

STORIES BY WOMEN

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Romance, melodrama, science fiction, and humor.

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THE PUTNAM TRADITION, by Sonia Dorman

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*Through generations
the power has descended,
now weaker, now stronger.
And which way did the
power run in the four-year-old
in the garden, playing
with a pie plate?*

It was an old house not far from the coast, and had descended generation by generation to the women of the Putnam family. Progress literally went by it: a new four-lane highway had been built two hundred yards from the ancient lilacs at the doorstep. Long before that, in the time of Cecily Putnam's husband, power lines had been run in, and now on cold nights the telephone wires sounded like a concert of cellos, while inside with a sound like the breaking of beetles, the grandmother Cecily moved through the walls in the grooves of tradition.

Simone Putnam, her granddaughter; Nina Putnam, her great-granddaughter; the unbroken succession of matriarchs continued, but times the old woman thought that in Simone it was weakened, and she looked at the four-year-old Nina askance, waiting, waiting, for some good sign.

Sometimes one of the Putnam women had given birth to a son, who grew sickly and died, or less often, grew healthy and fled. The husbands were usually strangers to the land, the house, and the women, and spent a lifetime with the long-lived Putnam wives, and died, leaving their

strange signs: telephone wires, electric lights, water pumps, brass plumbing.

Sam Harris came and married Simone, bringing with him an invasion of washer, dryer, toaster, mixer, coffeemaker, until the current poured through the walls of the house with more vigor than the blood in the old woman's veins.

"You don't approve of him," Simone said to her grandmother.

"It's his trade," Cecily Putnam answered. "Our men have been carpenters, or farmers, or even schoolmasters. But an engineer. Phui!"

Simone was washing the dishes, gazing out across the windowsill where two pink and white Murex shells stood, to the tidy garden beyond where Nina was engaged in her private games.

She dried the dishes by passing her hand once above each plate or glass, bringing it to a dry sparkle. It saved wear on the dishtowels, and it amused her.

"Sam's not home very much," she said in a placating voice. She herself had grown terrified, since her marriage, that she wouldn't be able to bear the weight of her past. She felt its power on her and couldn't carry it. Cecily had brought her up, after her father had disappeared and her mother had died in an unexplained accident. Daily she saw the reflection of her failure in the face of her grandmother, who seemed built of the same seasoned and secure wood as the old Putnam house. Simone looked at her grandmother, whom she loved, and became a mere vapor.

"He's not home so much," Simone said.

Her face was small, with a pointed chin, and she had golden-red hair which she wore loose on her shoulders. Nina, too, had a small face, but it was neither so pale nor so delicate as her mother's, as if Sam's tougher substance had filled her out and strengthened her bone structure. If it was true that she, Simone, was a weak link, then Sam's strength might have poured into the child, and there would be no more Putnam family and tradition.

"People don't change that easily," the old woman said.

"But things--" Simone began. The china which had a history of five generations slipped out of her hands and smashed; Sam's toaster wouldn't toast or pop up; Simone couldn't even use the telephone for fear of getting a wrong number, or no number at all.

"Things, things!" her grandmother cried. "It's blood that counts. If the blood is strong enough, things dissolve. They're just garbage, all those things, floating on the surface of our history. It's our history that's deep. That's what counts."

"You're afraid of Sam," the young woman accused.

"Not afraid of any man!" Cecily said, straightening her back. "But I'm afraid for the child. Sam has no family tradition, no depth, no talent handed down and perfected. A man with his head full of wheels and wires."

Simone loved him. She leaned on him and grew about him, and he supported her tenderly. She wasn't going to give him up for the sake of some abstract tradition--

--it's not abstract," her grandmother said with spirit. "It's in your blood. Or why don't you sweep the floors the way other women do? The way Sam's mother must?"

Simone had begun to clean the house while she was thinking, moving her hand horizontally across the floor, at the height of her hip, and the dust was following the motion of her hand and moving in a small, sun-brightened river toward the trash basket in the kitchen corner. Now Simone raised her hand to her face to look at it, and the river of dust rose like a serpent and hung a foot below her hand.

"Yes," she agreed, "at least I can clean the house. If I don't touch the good china, and look where I'm going."

"Phui," the old woman said again, angrily. "Don't feel so sorry for yourself."

"Not for myself," Simone mumbled, and looked again toward the garden where her daughter was doing something with three stones and a pie plate full of spring water.

"I do despair of Nina," Cecily said, as she had said before. "She's four, and has no appearance. Not even balance. She fell out of the applerose tree, and couldn't even help herself." Suddenly the old woman thrust her face close to her granddaughter. It was smooth, round, and sweet as a young kernel of corn. The eyes, sunk down under the bushy grey brows, were cold and clear grey.

"Simone," the old woman said. "You didn't lie to me? You did know she was falling, and couldn't get back in time to catch her?"

A shudder passed through Simone's body. There was no blood in her veins, only water; no marrow in her bones, they were empty, and porous as a bird's. Even the roots of her hair were weak, and now the sweat was starting out on her scalp as she faced her grandmother and saw the bristling shapes of seven generations of Putnam women behind her.

"You lied," the old woman said. "You didn't know she was falling."

Simone was a vapor, a mere froth blowing away on the first breeze.

"My poor dear," the old woman said in a gentle voice. "But how could you marry someone like Sam? Don't you know what will happen? He'll dissolve us, our history, our talents, our pride. Nina is nothing but an ordinary little child."

"She's a good child," Simone said, trying not to be angry. She wanted her child to be loved, to be strong. "Nina isn't a common child," she said, with her head bent. "She's very bright."

"A man with his head full of wheels, who's at home with electricity and wires," the old woman went on. "We've had them before, but never allowed them to dominate us. My own husband was such a man, but he was only allowed to make token gestures, such as having the power lines put in. He never understood how they worked." She lowered her voice to a whisper, "Your Sam understands. I've heard him talk to the water pump."

"That's why you're afraid of him," Simone said. "Not because I'm weak, and he might take something away from me, but because he's strong, and he might give us something. Then everything would change, and you're afraid of that. Nina might be our change." She pointed toward the garden.

Following the white line of her granddaughter's finger, Cecily looked out into the garden and saw Nina turn toward them as though she knew they were angry. The child pointed with one finger directly at them in the house. There was a sharp crackle, and something of a brilliant and vibrating blue leaped between the out-stretched fingers of mother and daughter, and flew up like a bird to the power lines above.

"Mommy," Nina called.

Simone's heart nearly broke with wonder and fright. Her grandmother contemptuously passed through the kitchen door and emerged on the step outside, but Simone opened the door and left it open behind her. "What was that?" she asked Nina. "Was it a bluebird?"

"Don't be silly," Nina said. She picked up the pie plate and brought it toward them. Cecily's face was white and translucent, one hand went to her throat as the child approached.

Brimfull of crackling blue fire with a fluctuating heart of yellow, the pie plate came toward them, held between Nina's small, dusty hands. Nina grinned at them. "I stole it out of the wires," she said.

Simone thought she would faint with a mixture of joy and fear. "Put it back," she whispered. "Please put it back."

"Oh Mommy," Nina said, beginning to whine. "Not now. Not right away. I just got it. I've done it lots of times." The pie plate crackled and hissed in the steady, small hands.

Simone could feel the old woman's shocked silence behind her. "You mustn't carry it in a pie plate, it's dangerous," Simone said to her

child, but she could see Nina was in no danger. "How often have you done this?" She could feel her skirt and her hair billow with electricity.

"Lots of times. You don't like it, do you?" She became teasing and roguish, when she looked most like Sam. Suddenly she threw back her head

and opened her mouth, and tilting up the pie plate she drank it empty. Her reddish gold hair sprang out in crackling rays around her face, her eyes flashed and sparks flew out between her teeth before she closed her mouth.

"Nina!" the old woman cried, and began to crumple, falling slowly against Simone in a complete faint. Simone caught her in trembling hands and lowered her gently. She said to her daughter, "You mustn't do that in front of Grandy. You're a bad girl, you knew it would scare her," and to herself she said: I must stop babbling, the child knows I'm being silly. O isn't it wonderful, isn't it awful, O Sam, how I love you.

"Daddy said it would scare you," Nina admitted. "That's why I never showed you before." Her hair was softly falling into place again, and she was gazing curiously at her great-grandmother lying on the doorstep.

"It did scare me," Simone said. "I'm not used to it, darling. But don't keep it secret any more."

"Is Grandy asleep?"

Simone said hastily, "Oh yes, she's taking a nap. She is old, you know, and likes to take naps."

"That's not a nap," Nina said, leaning over and patting the old woman's cheek, "I think she's having a bad dream."

Simone carried her grandmother into the house. If that old, tired heart had jumped and floundered like her own, there must be some damage done to it. If anything happened to her grandmother, the world would end, Simone thought, and was furious with Nina, and at the same time, full of joy for her.

Cecily Putnam opened her eyes widely, and Simone said, "It does change, you see. But it's in the family, after all."

The old woman sat upright quickly. "That wicked child!" she exclaimed. "To come and frighten us like that. She ought to be spanked." She got up with great strength and rushed out to the garden.

"Nina!" she called imperiously. The child picked up one of the small stones from the pie plate now full of spring water, and came to her great-grandmother.

"I'll make something for you, Grandy," she said seriously. She put the stone in the palm of her hand, and breathed on it, and then held out her hand and offered the diamond.

"It's lovely. Thank you," the old woman said with dignity, and put her hand on the child's head. "Let's go for a walk and I'll show you how to grow rose-apples. That's more becoming to a young lady."

"You slept on the step."

"Ah! I'm old and I like to take little naps," Cecily answered.

Simone saw them disappear among the applerose trees side by side. She was still trembling, but gradually, as she passed her hand back and forth, and the dust followed, moving in a sparkling river toward the

trash basket, Simone stopped trembling and began to smile with the natural pride of a Putnam woman.

THE END

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THE WHITE PAGODA, by Anne Sedgwick
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The drama of the drawing-rooms had begun years ago, but Owen Stacpole did not come into it until the day on which his cousin Gwendolen, after examining the box of bric-à-brac, remarked, refolding the last pieces of china in their dusty newspapers, that they were rubbish, and silly rubbish, too, of just the sort that Aunt Pickthorne had always unerringly accumulated. The box had arrived that morning, a legacy from this deceased relative; it had been brought up to the drawing-room and placed upon a sheet near the fire, so that Mrs. Conyers might examine its contents in comfort, and Owen, while he wrote at the black lacquer bureau in the window, had been aware of Gwendolen's gibes and exclamations behind him. Now, when she asserted that she would send the whole futile collection down to Mr. Glazebrook and see if he would give her enough for it to buy a pair of gloves with, Owen rose and limped to join her and to look down at the wooden box into which she was thrusting, with some vindictiveness, the dingy parcels.

"Have you looked at them all?" he inquired. "I forget--was your Aunt Pickthorne a Mrs. or a Miss? And how long has it been since she died?"

"About six months, poor old thing. And these treasures have evidently never been dusted since. She was a Mrs. Her husband was old Admiral Pickthorne--don't you remember?--and they lived, after he retired, at Cheltenham. Two more guileless Philistines I've never known. It used to make me feel quite ill to go and stay with them when I was a girl. I've hardly been at all since then, and that's probably why she selected all the most hideous objects in her drawing-room to leave me. How well I remember that drawing-room! Crocheted antimacassars; and a round, mahogany centre-table on which a lamp used to stand in the evening; and the wall-paper of frosted robin's-egg-blue, with stuffed birds in cases,

and terracotta plaques framed in ruby plush, hanging upon it--a perfectly horrible room. Half a dozen of the plaques are in there; the birds she spared me. She had one or two lovely old family things which I'd allowed myself to hope for; a Spode tea-set I remember. But, no; there's nothing worth looking at."

Mrs. Conyers lightly dusted her hands together, and rose from her knees. She was, at thirty-eight, a very graceful woman; tall, of ample form, and attired with fashionable ease and fluency. Fashion had been a late development with Gwendolen. In her gaunt and wistful girlhood she had worn her hair in drooping Rossettian masses, and her throat had been differently bare. Now she was as accurate as she was easy. Her hair was even a little too sophisticatedly distended, and her long pearl ear-rings, though they became the tender violet of her eyes, emphasized, as her former Pre-Raphaelite ornaments had not seemed to do, a certain genial commonplaceness in the contours of her cheek and chin. But almost

fat and decisively unpoetical as she had become, it was undeniable that this last phase of dress and, in especial, these widow's weeds, with sinuous lines of jet and lustrous falls of fringes, became her better than any in which Owen remembered to have seen her.

Gwendolen's drawing-room, too, had undergone, since the days of her girlhood, as complete a metamorphosis as she had. When she had married

and left the big house in Kensington where Owen had spent many a happy holiday--when she had married crabbed old Mr. Conyers, the Chislebridge dignitary, and gone to live in Chislebridge, her convictions had at once expressed themselves luxuriantly in large-patterned wall-papers and deep-cushioned divans and in Eastern fabrics draping the mantelpiece or cast irrelevantly over carved Indian screens. Her teas had been brought in on trays of Indian beaten brass, and the mosque-like opening between the front and back drawing-room had been hung with translucent curtains

of beaded reeds, through which one had to plunge as though through a sheet of dropping water. Owen well remembered their tinkle and rattle and the perfume of burning Eastern pastilles that greeted one when, emerging, one found oneself in the dim, rich gloom among the divans and the brasses and the palms. In those days Gwendolen had been draped rather than dressed, and the gestures and attitudes of her languid arms and wrists seemed more adapted to a dulcimer than to a tea-pot. But she dispensed excellent tea, and though her eyes were appropriately yearning, her talk was quite as reassuringly commonplace as Owen had always found it.

It was only in the course of years that the reed curtains and the carved Indian screens and the divans ebbed away; but the change was complete at last, and he found Gwendolen, with undulated hair puffed over a frame, and a small waist,--large waists not having then come in,--receiving her visitors in the most clear, calm, austere of rooms, with polished floor, Sheraton furniture, and Japanese colour-prints framed in white hanging on pensive spaces of willow-leaf-green wall. Gwendolen talked of Strauss's music and of the New English Art Club, was indignant at the prohibition of "Monna Vanna," and to some no longer apt remark of an aspiring caller answered that to speak so was surely to Ruskinize. He realized on this occasion that Gwendolen had become the arbiter of taste in Chislebridge. He followed her into several drawing-rooms and observed that she had set the fashion in furniture and wall-paper; that some were pushing their way toward Japanese prints, and some were even beginning to babble faintly of Manet. Five years had passed since then, and now, on this his first visit to Chislebridge since old Mr. Conyers's death, another change had taken place. Gwendolen's hips were compressed, her waist was large once more, though of a carefully calculated largeness, and only in a fine bit of the old furniture here and there did a trace of the former green drawing-room remain. This was certainly the most interesting room that Gwendolen had

yet achieved. There had been little character, if much charm, in the green drawing-room; one knew so many like it. With a slight self-discipline, its harmonies were really easy to attain. But it was not easy to attain a mingled richness and austerity; to be recondite, yet lovely; to set such cabinets of rosy old lacquer near such Chinese screens or hang subtle strips of Chinese painting on just the right shade of dim, white wall. It took money, it took time, it took knowledge to find such delicate cane-seated settees framed in black lacquer, and to pick up such engraved glass, such white Chinese porcelain and white Italian earthenware. Melting together in their dim splendour and shining softness, they had so enchantingly arrested Owen the night before that, pausing on the threshold, he had said with a whole-heartedness she had never yet heard from him, "Well, Gwen, yours is the loveliest room I've ever seen."

It was indeed triumphantly lovely, although, examining it more critically by the morning light, he had found slight dissatisfactions. It was perhaps a little too much like an admirably sophisticated curiosity-shop. It was an object to be examined with delight, hardly a subject to be lived with with love. And it almost distressed him to see the touch of genial commonplaceness expressing itself pervasively in the big bowls and jars and vases of pink roses that burgeoned everywhere. They showed no real sense of what the lacquer and glass and porcelain demanded; for they demanded surely a more fragile, less obvious flower. And one or two minor ornaments, though evidently selected with scrupulous conscientiousness, seemed to him equally at fault. Still, he had again that morning, before seating himself to write, repeated in all sincerity, "This is really the loveliest room," and Gwendolen, from where she knelt above Aunt Pickthorne's box, had answered, following his eyes, "I am _so_ glad you like it, dear Owen."

Gwendolen was very fond of him, and her fondness had never been so marked. It was of that he had been thinking as he wrote. He had never

felt fonder of Gwendolen. Her drawing-room was lovely, her widow's weeds became her, and she was, as she had always been, the kindest of creatures. In every sense the house would be a pleasanter one to stay at than in old Mr. Conyers's lifetime. Owen had not liked old Mr. Conyers, who had had too much the air of thinking himself an historical figure and his breakfast historical events, who snubbed his wife and quoted Greek and Latin pugnaciously, and took the cabinet ministers and duchesses who sometimes sojourned under his roof, with an unctuousness

that more marked the aridity of his manner toward less illustrious guests. The Conyers had come to count in the eyes of Chislebridge and the surrounding country as the social figure-heads of the studious old town, and Owen had found himself, as Gwendolen's crippled, writing, cousin, year by year of relatively less importance in the eyes of Gwendolen's husband. Actually, as it happened, he had during those years become almost illustrious himself; but his austere distinction, such as it was, had been as moonrise rather than dawn, and had left him as gently impersonal as before, and even more impoverished.

Negligible-looking as he knew he was, he had sometimes been amused to note old Mr. Conyers's bewilderment when a cabinet minister or a duchess manifested their pleasurable excitement in meeting him. As for Gwendolen, her essential loyalty and kindness had always remained the same since the days when she had protected him from the sallies of her boisterous brothers and sisters in the Kensington family mansion--the same till now. Last night and to-day he had recognised a difference. He wondered whether he was a conceited fool for imagining in Gwendolen a dwelling tenderness, a brooding touch, indeed, of reminiscent wistfulness. Was it to show an unbecoming complacency if he allowed his mind to dwell upon the possibilities that this development in Gwendolen presented to his imagination? He was delicate and poor and, despite a large visiting-list, he was lonely. He was fond of Gwendolen and of her two nice, dull boys. She amused him, it was true, as she had always amused him; for though her drawing-room had become interesting, though

she had developed a sense of humour, or at least the intention of humorousness, though she often attempted playfulness and even irony, she was still at heart as disproportionately earnest as she had been in youth. But Gwendolen would make no romantic demands upon him, and she would not expect him to take even red lacquer as seriously as she did, or to follow with the same breathlessness the erratic movements of modern æstheticism. She was accustomed to his passive unresponsiveness, and would resent it no more in the husband than in the friend. Altogether, as he sat there writing at Gwendolen's lovely bureau, he knew that a sense of homely magic grew upon him.

Next morning, wandering about the pleasant streets of the old town, he found himself before the window of Mr. Glazebrook's curiosity-shop--a shop well known to more than Chislebridge. He paused to look at the objects disposed with a dignified reticence against a dark background, and his eye was attracted by a very delightful red lacquer box that at once made him think of Gwendolen's drawing-room. Just the thing for her, it was. But as he entered the shop, Mr. Glazebrook leaned from within and took it from its place in the window. He was showing it to another customer.

Owen now quite vehemently longed to possess the box, which, he saw, as Mr. Glazebrook displayed it, was cunningly fitted with little inner segments, beautifully patterned in gold. Feigning an indifferent survey of the shop, he lingered near, hoping that his rival would relinquish her opportunity.

"Five pounds! O dear, that is too much for me, I'm afraid," he heard her say, and, at the voice, he turned and looked at her. The voice was unusual--a rapid, rather husky voice that made him think of muffled

bells or snow-bound water, gay in rhythm, yet marred in tone, almost as though the speaker had cried a great deal. She was an unusual figure, too, though he could not have said why, except that her dress seemed to recall bygone fashions quaintly, though without a hint of dowdiness or affectation. She wore a skirt and jacket of soft gray, with pleated lawn at neck and wrists, and her small gray hat was wreathed with violets. She held the lacquer box, and her face, rosy, crisp, decisive, and showing, like her voice, a marred gaiety, expressed her reluctant relinquishment and her strong desire. Owen had seen a child look at a forbidden fruit with just such an expression and he suddenly wished that he could give the box to her rather than to Gwendolen, to whom five pounds was a matter of small moment.

"I think I mustn't," she repeated, after a further hesitation, and setting the box down with cherishing care. "Not to-day. And I have so much red lacquer. It's like dram-drinking."

Mr. Glazebrook smiled affably. He was evidently on old-established terms with his customer. "Perhaps you'd like to look round a bit, Mrs. Waterlow," he suggested. "There are some nice pieces of old glass in the inner room, quite cheap, some of them--a set of old champagne glasses." Mrs. Waterlow, saying that she wanted some old champagne glasses, moved away.

"Do you think the lady has given up that box?" Owen asked. "I don't want to buy it if there's a chance of her changing her mind."

Mr. Glazebrook said that there was no such chance, the lady being one who knew her own mind; so the box was bought and Owen ordered it to be sent to Gwendolen. He said then that he would like to have a look round, too. He really wanted to have another look at the lady with the rosy face and the small gray hat trimmed with violets. He peered into

cabinets ranged thickly with old glass and china, examined the Worcester tea-set disposed upon a table and the case of Chinese tear-bottles and Japanese netzukés, and presently made his way into the smaller, dimmer room at the back.

"Oh, Mr. Glazebrook," said the lady in gray. She had heard his step, but had not turned. She was kneeling before an open packing-case and holding an object that she had drawn from it. Owen suddenly recognised the case. It was the one that Gwendolen yesterday had sent down to Mr. Glazebrook.

He called this person, raising his hat, and the lady looked round at him, too preoccupied to express her recognition of her mistake by more than a vague murmur of thanks. "Mr. Glazebrook," she said, holding up a whitish object, "may I have this? Is it expensive?"

"Well, really, I only glanced over the box. A customer sent it down to me to dispose of, and I didn't think there was anything in it worth much. Let me see, Mrs. Waterlow; it's a pagoda, I take it, a Chinese pagoda. We've had them from time to time, in ivory and smaller than this."

"This is in porcelain," said the lady, "and beautifully moulded."

"I see, I see," said Mr. Glazebrook, taking the fragile top segment of the disjointed pagoda in his hand, and rather at a loss; "and it's slightly damaged."

The lady in gray evidently was not a shrewd bargainer. "Only a little," she said. "One or two bits have been chipped out of the roofs, and it's lost one or two of its little crystal rings; but I think it's in quite good condition, and I have it all here." She was placing one segment upon the other. "They are all made to fit, you see, with the little

openings in each story."

She had built it up beside her as she knelt on the floor, and it stood like a fragile, fantastic ghost, with the upward tilt of its tiled roofs, its embossed patterns, and the crystal rings trembling from each angle of the roofs like raindrops. "What a darling!" said Mrs. Waterlow. "How much do you ask for it, Mr. Glazebrook?"

Mr. Glazebrook, adjusting his knowledge of the limitations of Mrs. Waterlow's purse to his present appreciation of the pagoda and of her desire for it, said genially, after a moment, that from an old customer like herself he would ask only forty-five shillings.

"Well, I think it's a great bargain, Mr. Glazebrook," said Mrs. Waterlow. "And I'll have it."

"Shall I send it round?" Mr. Glazebrook asked.

"Yes, please; or, no, it isn't heavy,"--she lifted it with both hands, rising with it and looking like a Saint Barbara holding her tower,--"I can manage it to just round the corner. Wrap it up for me, and I'll carry it off myself."

When Owen saw his cousin again at lunch, the red lacquer box had not yet arrived, and, with a touch of friendly mockery, he said:

"Well, you have been unlucky, my dear Gwen. There was the most charming piece of old Chinese porcelain in that scorned Cheltenham box, and I saw Mr. Glazebrook sell it this morning to a lady who wasn't to be put off by dust and newspapers and plush-framed plaques. She carried it off in triumph, saying that it was a great bargain. And so it was; but she might have had it for half the money if she hadn't informed Mr.

Glazebrook of its probable value."

Gwendolen fixed her mild, violet eyes upon him. "A piece of old Chinese porcelain? Do you mean that silly white pagoda?"

"You did see it, then?"

"See it? Haven't I seen it all my life? It stood on a purple worsted mat on a little bamboo table between the Nottingham lace curtains in one of Aunt Pickthorne's drawing-room windows, and looked like some piece of childish gimcrackery bought at a bazaar, where, I'll wager, she did buy it."

"Well, Mrs. Waterlow evidently didn't think it gimcrackery, or, if she did, she didn't mind. It looked to me, I confess, an exquisite thing. But her admiration may have lent it its enchantment."

Gwendolen's eyes now fixed themselves more searchingly than before.

"Mrs. Waterlow? Did Mrs. Waterlow buy it? How did you know it was Mrs. Waterlow? I thought you'd never met her."

"I haven't; but I heard Mr. Glazebrook call her by her name. She'd wanted to buy a red lacquer box that I spotted in the window and had gone in to get for you, my dear Gwen. It was too expensive for her,--so that it is yours,--and she went rummaging into the back shop and found your box with the things just as you and Mr. Glazebrook had left them, and in no time she'd disinterred the pagoda."

Gwendolen apparently was so arrested by his story that she forgot for the moment to thank him for the lacquer box.

"Do you know her?" he asked.

"Know her? Know Cicely Waterlow? Why, I've known her since she first came to live here, years ago. She's a very dear friend of mine," Gwendolen said, adding: "How much did she pay for it? That wretched man gave me only fifteen shillings for the lot."

"He made her pay forty-five shillings for the pagoda. I suspect myself that it's worth ten times as much. Does she care for things, too--lacquer and engraved glass?"

Gwendolen still showed preoccupation and, he fancied, a touch of vexation.

"Care for them? Yes; who with any taste doesn't care for them? Cicely has very good taste, too, in her little way. She doesn't know anything, but she picks up ideas and puts them together very cleverly. I can't help thinking that she'd never have given the pagoda a thought if my white porcelain hadn't educated her. I really can't believe that it's good, Owen."

Owen waived the point.

"Who is Mr. Waterlow?" he asked.

"He has been dead for fifteen or sixteen years. He died only a year after their marriage. A very delightful man, so people say who knew him. And Cicely lost her little girl, to whom she was passionately devoted, five years ago; she has never really recovered from that. She used to be so pretty, poor Cicely! She's lost it all now. She cried her very eyes out. She has a little money and lives with her mother-in-law, old Mrs. Waterlow, who is very fond of her. They don't entertain except in the quietest way, or go out much, and I do what I can to give Cicely a good

time. I often have her here to tea when I have interesting people staying."

"Oh, that's good. Do count me as interesting enough and ask her while I'm here."

"Interesting enough, my dear Owen! I don't suppose that Cicely often has a chance of meeting such an interesting man as you. Of course I'll ask her," said Gwendolen. Then, remembering his gift: "It was nice of you to get me a red lacquer box, Owen. I adore red lacquer, and I'm quite sure, whatever you and Cicely Waterlow may say, that it's worth a hundred of your white pagodas."

Mrs. Waterlow came to tea next afternoon, the last of Owen's stay. The drawing-room was crowded, and Owen, when she was announced, was enjoying a talk with a dismal-looking old philosopher who had plaintive, white hairs on his nose and trousers that bagged irremediably at the knees.

"Yes, indeed, I know her well," said Professor Selden, as Owen questioned him. "I play chess with her once a week. Her little girl was a great pet of mine. You never saw the little girl?"

"Never, and I've not yet met Mrs. Waterlow. She is most charming-looking."

"The little girl was so much like her," said Professor Selden, sadly.

"Yes, she is a charming woman. Don't let me keep you from meeting her. I am going to sit down here while our young friend Dawkins plays. You know Dawkins? Between ourselves, Mrs. Conyers thinks too highly of him."

Mrs. Waterlow's eyes turned upon him as he limped up to her and

Gwendolen, and smiling, she said, "Why, I saw you yesterday in Mr. Glazebrook's shop."

"Yes," said Owen, "and there is the red lacquer box."

"And you, Cicely, bought my pagoda," said Gwendolen.

"Your pagoda?" Mrs. Waterlow questioned, her eyes, that seemed to open with a little difficulty, resting on her hostess with some surprise.

"Was the pagoda yours?"

"Yes, mine," said Gwendolen. "It came in a box of rubbish,--you saw the kind of rubbish,--a legacy from an old aunt, and I bundled it off to Glazebrook. Owen says it is really good. Is it?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Mrs. Waterlow.

"I'm sure it is," said Owen, "and I liked the accuracy with which you fell in love with it at first sight."

"I did fall in love with it, good or bad," said Mrs. Waterlow. "Don't tell me that you want it back again, Gwendolen. But if it was a mistake, of course----"

He recognised in her the note of guilelessness and, with some decision, for he actually perceived an eagerness in Gwendolen's glance, interposed with, "But Gwendolen thinks it gimcrackery, and wouldn't have it at any price. Isn't it so, Gwendolen?"

Poor Gwendolen was looking a little glum; but she was the most unresentful of creatures.

"Indeed, it is," she said. "I did think it gimcrackery; but, to tell the

truth, I never really saw it at all. I can't believe you'd have seen it, Cicely, standing on its worsted mat in my Aunt Pickthorne's drawing-room. But I wouldn't dream, of course, of taking it back; and if it's really good, I'm more glad than I can say that my loss should be your gain. Now, won't you and Owen sit down here and listen to my wonderful Perceval Dawkins? Oh, he is going to astonish the world some day."

Mrs. Waterlow and Owen, in the intervals of the ensuing music, talked together. Seen more closely, he found that her face, though not beautiful, was even more singularly delightful than he had thought it. She had eyes merry, yet tired, like those of a sleepy child, and sweet, small, firm lips and a glance and smile at once very frank and very remote. There was about her none of that aroma of sorrow that some women distil from the tragedies of their lives, and wear, even if unconsciously, like an allurements. He felt that in Mrs. Waterlow sorrow had been an isolating, a bewildering, a devastating experience, making her at once more ready to take refuge in the trivialities of life and more unable to admit an intimacy into the essentials. Yet the spring of vitality and mirth was so strong in her that in all she said he felt a quality restorative, aromatic, fragrant, as if he were walking in spring woods and smelt everywhere the rising sap and the breath of violets. She was remote, blighted, yet buoyant. When she rose to go, he realised with sudden dismay that to-day was his last in Chislebridge and that he should not see her again for who knew how long.

"Is the pagoda placed?" he asked her. "Does it fulfil your expectations?"

"Yes, indeed," she said. "I spent two hours yesterday in washing and mending it. It is immaculate now, as lovely as a pearl."

"I wish I could see it," said Owen.

"Why, pray, then, come and see it. Can you come to tea with me and my mother-in-law to-morrow?"

"I'm going away to-morrow," said Owen, dismally. And then he bethought him. "Can't I walk back with you now? Is it too late? Only five-thirty."

"Not in the least too late. Mamma will still be having tea, and she loves people to drop in. But ought you to come away?" Mrs. Waterlow glanced round the crowded room.

"I'll not be missed," he assured her with some conscious speciousness.

Gwendolen, indeed, had time only for a little stare of surprise when he told her that he was going to look at the pagoda with Mrs. Waterlow. She was receiving new guests, richly furred and motor-veiled ladies who had come in from the country and were expatiating over the beauties of the red lacquer cabinets, Gwendolen's latest acquisitions.

"That will be delightful," she said; "and now Owen will see that sweet drawing-room of yours, dearest. You have made it so pretty!"

Owen observed that Mrs. Waterlow, while maintaining all the suavities of intercourse, did not address Gwendolen as dearest.

It was not far to Mrs. Waterlow's, and he said, in reply to her question, that he liked walking, if she didn't mind going slowly on his account. He found himself telling her, then, about his lameness. A bad fall while skating in boyhood had handicapped him for life. The lamps had just been lighted and the evening of early spring was blurred with mist. Catkins hung against a faintly rosy sky, and in the gardens that they passed the crocuses stood thickly. Owen had a sense of adventure

poignant in its reminiscent magic. Not for years had he so felt the savour of youth. He realised, with a deep happiness, that Mrs. Waterlow liked him; sometimes she laughed at things he said, and once or twice when her eyes turned on him he fancied in them the same expression of happy discovery with which she had looked at the pagoda. Well, he reflected, if she thought him delightful, too, she had had to get through a great many dusty newspapers to find him.

Mrs. Waterlow lived, away from the gardened houses of Chislebridge, in a small but rather stately house with a Georgian façade which stood on one of the narrower, older streets. They went up two or three stone steps from the pavement and knocked at a very bright and massive knocker, and the door was opened by a middle-aged Quakerish maid. The drawing-room was on the ground floor, and Mrs. Waterlow led him in.

Owen's astonishment, when he entered, prompted him to stand still and to gaze about him; but luckily he could not yield to the impulse, for he had to cross to the fire, near which, behind her tea-table, old Mrs. Waterlow sat, and had to be presented to her and to the middle-aged, academic-looking lady who was having tea with her. He was glad of the respite, for he had received a shock.

Old Mrs. Waterlow had dark, authoritative eyes and white hair much dressed under black lace, and the finest of hands, decorated with old seals and old diamonds. She must, he felt, be a companion at once inspiring and disquieting, for she had the demeanour of a naughty, haughty child, and, as she held Owen in talk for some moments, he perceived that her conversation was of a sort to cause alarm and amusement in her listeners. Poor old Professor Selden, who was mentioned, offered her an opportunity for the frankest witticisms, and,--when her daughter-in-law protested,--"Yes, dear, I know you are fond of him," the old lady replied, "and so am I; but he is, all the

same, very like a damp potato that has begun to sprout."

"Now look at my pagoda, Mr. Stacpole," said young Mrs. Waterlow, laughing, yet, he saw, not pleased, and turning from the fire where she had been standing with her foot on the fender.

"Does Mr. Stacpole care for bric-à-brac, too?" old Mrs. Waterlow inquired. "Cicely came home with this last treasure in as much triumph as if some one had left her a fortune. I resent the pagoda because it means that she will go without a spring hat. She is always coming home in triumph and always doing without hats; and I sit here without an atom of taste, and get the credit for hers. Frankly, Sybilla, my dear," she addressed the academic lady, "I'd be quite content to sit upon red reps and to cover my tea-pot with a pink satin cosy with apple-blossoms painted on it. I had such a cosy given to me this Christmas; but Cicely wouldn't let me use it."

Owen had risen to face his ordeal. Mrs. Waterlow, he had seen it in the first astonished glance, had, like everybody else in Chislebridge, been imitating Gwendolen, and his whole conception of her was undergoing a reconstruction. He followed her to the table on which the white pagoda stood, glancing about him and taking in deep drafts of disillusion. Red lacquer and Japanese prints, white porcelain and dimly shining jars of old Venetian glass—it was a replica, even to its white walls, of Gwendolen's drawing-room, but hushed and saddened, as it were, humbly smiling, with folded hands and no attempt at emulation. And in the midst, beautifully in place on its little black lacquer table, was the pagoda, offering him not a hint of help, but seeming rather, to smile at him with a fantastic and malicious mirth. He was aware, as from the pagoda he brought his eyes back to young Mrs. Waterlow, that he was dreadfully sorry. In another woman he would not have given the naïve derivativeness a thought; but in her, whom he had felt so full of savour and independence? One thing only helped him, beside the effortless

atmosphere of the room, and that was the fact--he clung to it--that the glasses set everywhere among the red and black and white were filled not, thank goodness! with pink roses, but with poppy anemones, white and purple and rose. And the first thing he found to say of the pagoda to Mrs. Waterlow was, "It looks lovely in here," and then, turning to the nearest bowl of delicate colour, he added, "and how beautifully these flowers go with your room!"

He wondered, as their eyes met over the anemones, whether Mrs. Waterlow guessed his discomfiture.

When he saw Gwendolen that evening she asked him at once whether he liked old Mrs. Waterlow. She did not ask him how he liked young Mrs. Waterlow's drawing-room, and he reflected that this was really very magnanimous of her.

"She seems a witty old lady," he said. "Her daughter-in-law can't be dull with her."

"She's witty, but I always feel her a little spiteful, too," said Gwendolen. "We never get on, she and I. I hate hearing my neighbours scored off, and she has such an eye for people's foibles. I don't think that Cicely always quite likes it, either; but they are devoted to each other. If it weren't for old Mrs. Waterlow, I'd try to see a great deal more of Cicely; I'm really fond of her."

* * * * *

He did not go to Chislebridge for another six months. Gwendolen asked him very pressingly on various occasions, but twice he was engaged and once ill and too depressed and jaded to make the effort. It was the time of all others when Gwendolen and her ministrations would have been most acceptable, but he shrank from submitting himself to their influences,

feeling that in his very need he might find too great a compulsion. The thought of Gwendolen and of her possible place in his life must be adjourned--adjourned until she was well out of her mourning and he was able to meet it more impartially.

He saw Gwendolen in London and gave her and her boys tea at his rooms, the dingily comfortable rooms near Manchester Square from which for many

years he had not had the initiative to move. There was more potency, he found, in the imaginary Gwendolen than in the real one. The sight of her brought back vividly the thought of Mrs. Waterlow. Curiously, they seemed to have spoiled each other. Gwendolen had all the ethical advantages and even, if it came to that, all the æsthetic ones; yet, ambiguous as the image of the other had become, its charm challenged Gwendolen's virtues and Gwendolen's achievements. He even felt that he could be sure of nothing until he next stayed with Gwendolen, when he must see Mrs. Waterlow and weigh the possible friendship with her, tarnished though it were, against the comfortable solutions that Gwendolen held out to him. Again, curiously, he knew that the two could not be combined.

Gwendolen, however, was gone away to the south of France when he wrote

to her in November and asked if he might stop a day and night on his way through Chislebridge to a country week-end. But he had a two-hours' wait at the station, and he suddenly determined, when he found himself on the platform, to go and have tea with Mrs. Waterlow.

He drove up to the peaceful street where, above the college wall that ran along its upper end, a close tracery of branches showed against the sky, and he found that a welcoming firelight shone in the spacious windows of the Georgian house. His dismay, therefore, was the more untempered when the mildly austere maid told him that Mrs. Waterlow was

away. His pause there on the threshold expressed his condition, and the maid suggested that he might care to come in and see old Mrs. Waterlow. This, he felt, was indeed better than not to go in at all. So he was led for a second time into the drawing-room.

He had been obliged on the former visit to conceal astonishment; but now he found himself alone, and no concealment was needed. And the former astonishment was slight compared with this one. He felt almost giddy as he gazed about him. Nothing was the same. Everything was fantastically, incredibly different, except--his eye caught it with a sharpened pang of wonder--the white pagoda; for there, in the centre of the room, upon a round, mahogany table, with heavily bowed and richly carved legs, the white pagoda stood, and under it an old bead mat,--a mat of faded, old blue beads,--his eyes were riveted on the pagoda and its setting,--of white and gray and blue beads dotted with pink rosebuds. At regular intervals, raying out from the centre, books were placed upon the table--small, sober books bound in calf.

So the pagoda stood, the pivot of an incredible room; yet, inconceivable as it seemed, as right there, all its exquisite absurdity revealed, as it had been right in the other. It was the one link that joined them, the one thread in the labyrinth of his astonishment; and it seemed, with its ambiguous, fantastic smile, to symbolize its absent owner. Was it an exquisite, extravagant, elaborate joke that she and the pagoda were having together?

For the whole room was now a joke. It was furnished with a suite of black satin--sofas, easy-chairs, little chairs with carved, excruciating backs, all densely buttoned and richly fringed. Over the backs of the easy-chairs were laid antimacassars of finely crocheted white lace. Upon two tall pieces of mahogany, ranged up and down with knobbed drawers and recalling in their decorous solidity the buttoned bodices of

mid-Victorian matrons, stood high-handed, white marble urns. An oval gilt mirror hung above the mantelpiece, and upon it stood two lustres ringed with prisms of glass and a little clock of gilt and marble, ornamented with two marble doves hovering over a gilt nest wherein lay marble eggs. Between the clock and the lustres, on either side, was a vase of Bohemian glass, each holding a small nosegay of red and white roses. Mahogany footstools with bead-worked tops stood before the fire, and upon the walls hung, exquisite in their absurdity, like the pagoda, a whole botanical series of flat, feeble old flower-pieces, neatly coloured drawings, as accurate and as lifeless as vigilant, uninspired labour could make them.

No, it was a dream, an insane, delightful dream; for, with it all, above it all, how and why he could not say, the room was delightful. It seemed to set one free from some burden of appreciation that all unconsciously one had been carrying and had been finding heavy. One could live in it, laughing at and with it. For it all laughed--surely yes; and the elfish chorus was led by the white pagoda, standing like a Chinese Pierrot, at the centre of the revels.

Old Mrs. Waterlow at last came sailing in, and her black lace shawl and lace-draped head looked as appropriate in the room as everything else seemed to do. Her eyes dwelt on him with a certain fixity, and in them he seemed to read further significances. They held an intention, gay, precise, such as he had felt in the room; and they held, too, it might be, a touch of light-hearted cruelty.

"Yes, isn't it changed?" she said, and he knew that his state of astonishment had spoken from his face.

He stared round him again, smiling.

"It makes me feel," he said, "like the old woman in the nursery rhyme

whose skirts were cut up to her knees while she was asleep. One says, 'If I be I.'"

"And I'm the little dog," said Mrs. Waterlow; "but one who doesn't bark at you, so that you can be assured of your identity. I am really more aware of my own in this room than in any I've lived in for years. It is like one of the rooms of my girlhood. Rooms weren't so important then as they are now, and the people who lived in them, I sometimes think, were more so. It amuses me nowadays," said the old lady moving to her tea-table and seating herself, "to observe the way in which people are assessed by their tastes and their belongings. You say of some one that she is a dull or a disagreeable woman, and the answer and rebuke you receive is, 'Oh, but she has such wonderful Chinese screens!' Sit down here, Mr. Stacpole. It is very nice to see you again."

"But tell me, where is the other room?" Owen asked, drawing his chair to the table, "Is it disbanded, dissolved, gone for ever?"

Mrs. Waterlow looked at him with an air of half-malicious mystery.

"That is a secret, my own little secret, just as this room is, in a way, a little joke which, for my sake, Cicely has made for me. It was finished last week, by the way, and you are the first person to see it. Your cousin is in the south of France, isn't she?" said Mrs. Waterlow, with bland inconsequence.

"Yes; I'm only passing through. Gwendolen's been gone for nearly a month."

"Yes; I know," Mrs. Waterlow pursued, still with the genial blandness. "And as to our little joke, Mr. Stacpole, this room, in fact, is in many ways a room of my girlhood. The furniture was my mother's, and Cicely, when the idea struck her, had it brought from the garret of my old home,

where it has stood in disgrace for many a year. She has been clever about it, hasn't she?"

"It's genius," said Owen, "What made her think of it?" And then, with a pang, he wondered whether Gwendolen had thought of it first. Was it imaginable that Gwendolen could have turned away from beauty and plunged herself into such gay austerities of ugliness?

"Well, things are in the air, you know," said Mrs. Waterlow, pouring out the tea,--"that's what Cicely always says, at all events,--reactions, repulsions, wearinesses. This room is, she says, a discipline."

"Things in the air": had Gwendolen felt them first, and Mrs. Waterlow felt them after her? This question of priority became of burning interest for him.

"The trouble is that one may get too much of any discipline," he commented, "if it ceases to be self-inflicted and is imposed upon us. How would your daughter like it if all Chislebridge took to buttoned black satin and old flower-pieces? It's as an exception that it has its charm and its meaning. But if it became a commonplace?"

"Well, that's the point," said old Mrs. Waterlow. "Will it? It has very much vexed me for years to watch Chislebridge picking Cicely's brains. And I said to her that I wondered whether it would be possible for her to make a room that wouldn't be copied, and she said that she believed she could. If she could achieve ugliness, she said--downright ugliness, she believed they would fall back. The room is a sort of wager between us, for I am not at all convinced that she will succeed. Sheep, you know, will leap into the ditch if they see their leader land there."

Owen's head was whirling. It was as though suddenly the little crystal

rings of the pagoda had given out a sportive, significant tinkle. This, then, was what it meant? It was a jest, a game; but it was also a trap. For whom? Chislebridge, on old Mrs. Waterlow's lips, could mean only Gwendolen. He did not know quite what he hoped or feared, but he knew that he must conceal from old Mrs. Waterlow his recognition of her meaning.

"I felt from the first moment that I saw her in the curiosity-shop that Mrs. Waterlow was the sort of person who would always find the white pagodas," he said, smiling above his perturbation; "but I shouldn't have supposed that Chislebridge was intelligent enough, let us put it, to realise it, too, and to follow her lead."

"It's not that they realise it," the old lady interpreted, salting her scone; "it's something deeper than realisation. It's instinct--the instinct of the insignificant for aping the significant. They would probably be annoyed if they were told that they aped Cicely. They hardly know they do it, I will say that for them, if it's anything to their credit. And then since she is poor and they--some of them--rich, their copies are seen by a hundred to the one who sees her original, and Cicely, to some people, I've no doubt of it, seems the ape. It has very much vexed me," Mrs. Waterlow repeated.

Owen, for all his loyal feint of unconsciousness, was growing rather angry with Gwendolen.

"I don't wonder that it should," he said. "It vexes me to hear about it. Has it gone on for long?"

"Ever since we came to live here after my son's death. People at that time had draped, crowded drawing-rooms,--you remember the dreadful epoch. The more pots and pans and patterns and palms they could squeeze

into them, the better they were pleased. Cicely had simple furniture and quiet spaces and plain green wall-paper when no one else in Chislebridge had. She fell in love with Japanese prints in Paris and bought them when no one else in Chislebridge thought of doing so.--It's wrong, now, I hear, to like them. Chinese paintings are the correct thing.--Chislebridge stared at them and at her empty room, and wondered how she could care for those hideous women. They stared only for a year or two. When they saw that she was quite indifferent to their opinion and intended to remain in the ditch, they jumped in after her. I was amused when I first saw Japanese prints on some one else's green walls and heard the Goncourts and Whistler being quoted to Cicely. Then by degrees Cicely got tired of green paper, especially since everybody in Chislebridge by then had it, and she put, with her white walls, the red lacquer and the glass and that beautiful old set of cane-seated furniture that you saw; and no one else in Chislebridge at that time had white walls or a scrap of lacquer. She shifted and rearranged like a bird building its nest, and Chislebridge stared again and said that the white walls were like a workhouse; and then they began to look for lacquer and to put up white paper. Her very grouping has been copied, the smallest points of adjustment. It's not," Mrs. Waterlow pursued, "that I mind people imitating, if they do it frankly and own themselves plagiarists. We must all see the things we like for the first time. But it's not because they like the things that they have them; they have them because some one else likes them. They dress themselves in other people's tastes and make a fine figure as originators." The vexation of years was crystallized in the lightness and crispness of her voice.

Poor, stupid Gwendolen! After all, one must not be too hard on her. He felt Mrs. Waterlow to be so hard that he reacted to something approaching pitying tolerance, Gwendolen could be stupid in such good faith. There was nothing, when he came to think of it, surprising in this revelation of her stupidity, nothing painful, as there had been in suspecting Cicely Waterlow of stupidity. Gwendolen was so sincerely

unaware of having no ideas of her own. He wondered, as he said good-bye to old Mrs. Waterlow and told her that he felt convinced that she had at last reached a haven, whether she guessed that she had made him happy rather than unhappy.

She had made him so happy, with his recovered ideal, that as he drove away it was with a definite thrust of fear that he suddenly remembered Gwendolen's kindly criticism of old Mrs. Waterlow. Was it not possible, after all, that she had been indulging in sheer malice at Gwendolen's expense? Wasn't it possible that Gwendolen and Cicely Waterlow had had the same inspirations independently? But no two people could stumble at once on such a drawing-room as that he had just left. Horrid thought--what if Gwendolen's drawing-room at this moment showed just such a singular reversion to ugliness? After his delicious relief, he could not bear the doubt.

He drove to Gwendolen's. Yes, the old housekeeper, who knew him, said he could of course go up and look at the red lacquer. The red lacquer! He could almost have embraced her for the joy her words gave him. Gwendolen would not have retained red lacquer with a black satin suite. And on the threshold of Gwendolen's drawing-room he received full reassurance. The lovely room was intact. The blacks and whites and reds and golds were all there, unchanged, not a breath of the ambiguous discipline upon them. And in the midst of them all it was not Gwendolen, but Cicely Waterlow, whom he seemed to see smiling upon him, merry, tired, and tolerant. She had, as it were, demonstrated her claim not only to her present, but to her past. For if she had not copied Gwendolen in the mid-Victorian backwater, why should she have copied her in this? She had been first in both, and in her backwater she was now safe.

Many months passed before he saw Gwendolen's drawing-room again. He was

felled early in the winter by a long and dangerous illness. When he was able to crawl about, he went to the south of France and stayed there for over a year. He was so ill, so tired, and so weak that, if Gwendolen and the boys hadn't joined him, if she hadn't nursed and amused and encouraged him from day to day, he felt that he should probably have died and made an end of it. Gwendolen was more than kind. She was at once tender and tactful, and the only claim she made was that of her long-standing solicitude on his account. Upon this, as upon a comfortable, impersonal cushion that she adjusted for his weary head, she invited him to lean, and upon it for months of dazed invalidism and dubious convalescence he did lean. Lapped round by this fundamental kindness, the flaws and absurdities of Gwendolen's character disappeared. The long pearl ear-rings dangled now over the most delicious beef-teas, which she herself made for him; the graceful hands could perform efficient tasks. Of how very little importance it was that a woman should not show originality in her drawing-room when she could show in taxing daily intercourse such wisdom and resource and sweetness!

Life had contracted about them, and on these simple and elementary terms

he found that Gwendolen neither bored nor ruffled him. When she at last left him he knew that the bond between them, unspoken as it remained, was stronger than it had ever yet been, and that when he next saw her he would probably find it the most natural of things to ask her to marry him, and to take care of him for ever. Poor, good, kind Gwendolen! It was with a pensive humility and mirth that he resigned himself to the thought of the bad bargain she would make.

He came back to England in the spring following that in which he had

left it, and went at once to Chislebridge. It was late afternoon when he drove, in a twilight like his own mood of meditative acceptance, to the well-known house. Ample and benignant it stood behind its walls and lawns and trees, and seemed to look upon him with eyes of unresentful patience.

He limped in and Gwendolen met him in the hall.

"My dear, dear Owen, how are you? Yes, I had your wire this morning. Good; I see that the journey has done you no harm. But you are tired, aren't you? Will you go to your own room or have tea with me at once? It's just been brought in."

He said that he would have tea with her. She did not actually help him up the stairs, but as, with skill impaired, he swung himself from step to step, the touch of her tactful and ready hand was upon his arm, a caress rather than a sustainment. Passing the hand through his arm, she led him into the drawing-room.

Owen looked about him. He stood for a long moment in the door and looked. He then allowed himself a cautious, side-long glance at Gwendolen. Her eyes, unaware in their bland complacency, had followed his and rested upon her room.

"Oh, yes, I'd forgotten that you hadn't seen my new drawing-room," she said. "We've had great changes."

Even in his horror, for it was hardly less, he was touched to realize that Gwendolen was thinking far less of her drawing-room than of him. She might have forgotten that it had changed, had he not so helplessly displayed his amazement.

"Yes, indeed," he said. He limped to the fire and sank heavily into the

deep, black satin easy-chair drawn before it. He leaned his elbow on his knee and rested his head on his hand, and as he did so he observed that before the fire stood a mahogany footstool with a bead-worked top.

"You are tired, dear Owen. Do you feel ill?" Gwendolen hovered above his chair.

"I do feel a little giddy," he confessed. "I'm not all right yet, I see."

He raised his head. It was to face the mantelpiece, with its oval, gilt mirror and crystal lustres and gilt-and-marble clock. No, there were not doves and a nest upon it. This was a finer clock than the one with the doves, and the lustres were larger, and the flowers that stood between were mauve orchids. Gwendolen always went astray over her flowers.

"Here is tea," she said, seating herself at a little mahogany table with bowed and decorated legs. "Of course you're bound to feel tired, dear Owen, after your journey. Tea will be the very thing for you."

He turned now a furtive eye along the wall. Flower-pieces, dim, flat, old flower-pieces and arid steel-engravings and tall pieces of mahogany furniture with marble vases upon them--no mistakes had been made here, for if the vases were not urns, they were of marble and in their places.

"How do you like it in this phase?" Gwendolen asked him, tactfully turning from the question of his weakness. "I love it myself, I own, though of course Chislebridge thinks I've lost my wits. To tell you the truth, Owen, I was tired of beauty. One may come to that. One may feel," said Gwendolen, pouring out the tea, "that one needs a discipline. This room is my discipline, and after it I know that I shall find self-indulgence almost vulgar."

No; his mind was working to and fro between the present and the past with the rapidity and accuracy of a shuttle threading an intricate pattern--no, he had never mentioned to Gwendolen that late autumnal visit of his to Chislebridge eighteen months ago. Had that been because to mention it and the transformation he had been the first to witness in Mrs. Waterlow's drawing-room would have been, in a sense, to give Gwendolen a warning? And had he not, in his deepening affection for her, conceived her to be above the need of such warnings? Yes; for though he had been glad to recover his ideal of young Mrs. Waterlow, though he had been more than willing that Gwendolen should occupy the slightly ridiculous and humiliating position that he had imagined to be Mrs. Waterlow's, he had never for a moment imagined that Gwendolen's disingenuous docility would go as far as this. So many people might love red lacquer and old glass with a clear conscience, once they had been brought to see them; but who, with a clear conscience, could love black satin furniture and marble vases?

"It is a very singular room," he found at last, in comment upon her information. "How--and when--did you come to think of it?" He heard the hollow sound of his own voice; but Gwendolen remained unaware. The fact of her stupidity cast a merciful veil of pitifulness over her.

"I hardly know," she said, handing him his tea and happy in her theme. "These things are in the air at a given time--reactions, repulsions, wearinesses--I think. It grew bit by bit; I've brought it to this state only since my return from the Riviera. The idea came to me, oh, long ago--long before your illness. Alec Chambers is perfectly entranced with it, and vows it is the most beautiful--yes, beautiful--room in existence. It is witty as well as beautiful, he says, and he is going to paint it for the New English Art Club. Rooms have a curious influence upon me, you know, Owen. I really do feel," said Gwendolen busying herself hospitably with his little plate and hot, buttered toast, "that

I've grown cleverer since living in this one."

Owen, while she talked and while he drank his tea, had been more frankly looking about him. Flagrant as was the plagiarism, Gwendolen, as before, had protected herself by a more illustrious achievement. It was a stately, not a staid room; it carried the idea higher, and thereby missed it. It was not an amusing room, nor witty, to any one who had seen the original. It was impressive, oppressive, almost forbidding. Gwendolen, for one thing, had had more space to fill. The naïveté of mere flower-pieces would not furnish her walls, and she had lapsed into sheer ugliness with the large and admirably accurate steel-engravings. Caution, too, had been mistakenly exercised here and there; the black satin furniture had no antimacassars and the centre-table no ornament except a vase of orchids and calf-bound books.

Owen felt no indignation; he would always remain too fond of Gwendolen, too tolerant of her folly, to feel indignant with her; it was with a mild but final irony that he brought his eyes back at last to his unconscious and hapless cousin. And he wondered how far Gwendolen had gone, how far she could be made to go. "There's only one thing that it lacks," he said. "Shall I tell you?"

"Oh, do," she urged, beaming over her tea. "You know how much I value your taste."

"Oh, I haven't much taste," said Owen, "I've never gone in for having taste. And doesn't your room prove that taste is a mistake if indulged too far? It's more a sense of literary fitness I allude to. Yours is meant to be a soulless room, isn't it? That's your intention?"

"Exactly," said Gwendolen, with eager apprehension; "that is just it--a soulless room. One is sick of souls, just as one is sick of beauty."

"Exactly," Owen echoed her. "But, since you have here a travesty of beauty, what you need to complete your idea is a travesty of soul. You need a centre that draws it all into focus. You need something that, alas! you might have had, and have lost for ever. The white pagoda, Gwendolen, that Mrs. Waterlow found. Your room needs that, and only that, to make it perfect."

He spoke in his flat, weak invalid's voice, but he was wondering, almost with ardour, if Gwendolen, this touchstone applied, would suspect or remember and, from penitence or caution, redeem herself by a confession. For a moment, only a moment, she looked at him very earnestly; and he was aware that he hoped that she was going to redeem herself--hoped it almost ardently, not for his own sake--those sober hopes were dead for ever--but for the sake of the past and what it had really held of fondness and sympathy and essential respect.

Gwendolen looked at him earnestly; it was as though a dim suspicion crossed her; and then, poor thing! she put it aside. Yes, he was very sorry for her as he listened to her.

"Owen, that is clever of you," she said, "but very, very clever. That is precisely what I've been saying to myself ever since the idea came to me. I can't forgive myself for that piece of stupidity--my only one, I will say, in regard to such recognitions and perceptions. I may be a stupid woman about a great many things, but I'm not stupid about rooms. The horror of Aunt Pickthorne's room dulled my eyes so that in all truth I can say that I never saw that pagoda. And from the moment I've had my idea I've moaned--but literally moaned--over having lost it. Of course it is what the room needs, and all that it needs--the travesty of a soul standing on that mahogany table."

"Yes, the centre-table is the place for it," said Owen.

"It is clever of you to feel it just as I do, Owen, dear," she went on. "The pagoda was meant for this room and for this room only; for, you know, I didn't think Cicely Waterlow at all happily inspired in placing it as she had."

"As she had?" He rapped the question out with irrepressible quickness.

"Yes, among all that rather trashy lacquer and glass in that rather gimcrackery little drawing-room of hers. The pagoda looked there, what it had always looked in Aunt Pickthorne's room--a gimcrack itself."

"Looked?" he repeated. "How does it look now? How has she placed it now?"

And, for the first time in all their intercourse, he saw that Gwendolen was suddenly confused. He had hardly trapped her. She had set the trap herself, and inadvertently had walked into it. A faint colour rose to her cheek. She dropped for a moment her eyes upon the fire. Then, covering her self-consciousness with a show of smiling vivacity, she knelt to poke the logs, saying:

"I don't know, I really don't know, Owen. Cicely is always changing her room, you know. She is very quick at feeling what's in the air--as quick as I am really--and I haven't seen her for ages. She has gone to live in London--oh, yes, didn't you know? Yes, she came into a little money over a year ago, and she and old Mrs. Waterlow have taken a house in Chelsea, and are coming back to Chislebridge only for two or three months in every year. They are very fond of Chislebridge. So I haven't an idea of what her drawing-room is like now."

"Perhaps it's like yours," Owen suggested. "The one I saw was rather

like yours, I remember."

Gwendolen opened kind and repudiating eyes.

"Do you think so, Owen? Like mine? Oh, only in one or two superficial little things. She hadn't a Chinese screen or a lacquer cabinet or a piece of Chinese painting to bless herself with, poor little Cicely! No, indeed, Owen; I don't think it would be at all fair to say that Cicely copied me. These things are in the air."

* * * * *

Before he left Chislebridge he asked Gwendolen for Mrs. Waterlow's London address, and observed that she did not flinch in giving it to him. He inferred from this that Mrs. Waterlow's black satin suite had not left Chislebridge and that Gwendolen knew that she had nothing to fear from a London visit. Would she indeed fear anything from any visit? Her placid self-deception was so profound that it would be difficult to draw a line fairly between skilful fraud and instinctive self-protection. Gwendolen, without doubt, conceived herself completely protected. She would never suspect him of suspecting her.

He felt, when he got back to London, a certain reluctance in going to see Mrs. Waterlow. It was not only that he shrank from reading in old Mrs. Waterlow's malicious eyes the recognition of his discovery; in regard to young Mrs. Waterlow there was another shrinking that was almost one of shyness. She had been wronged, grossly wronged, by some one to whom he must show the semblance of loyalty, and the consciousness of her wrongs affected him deeply. A fortnight passed before he made his way one afternoon to Chelsea, a fortnight in which the main consciousness that filled his sense of renewal was that of his merciful escape. Mrs. Waterlow's house was in St. Leonard's Terrace, one of the

narrow, old houses that face the expanse of the Royal Hospital Gardens. The spring sun, as he limped along, was shining upon their façades--dull, old brick and dim, white paint-like slabs of ancient wedding-cake with frosted edging.

After all the expense of his illness, he was very poor in these days, and had come with difficulty in a 'bus. As he opened the gate and went into the flagged garden, where white tulips grew, he glanced up and saw young Mrs. Waterlow standing looking out at the drawing-room window. Her

eyes met his in surprise, they had not seen each other for so long a time; then, as lifting his hat he smiled at her, he thought he saw in them a sudden pity and gravity. He did of course look so much more battered than when she had last seen him. The nice, middle-aged maid let him in--he was glad of that--and, as he followed her up the narrow staircase, with its white, panelled walls, he wondered which drawing-room it was to be, and felt his heart sink strangely at the thought that perhaps, after all, Mrs. Waterlow had transplanted her discipline to London.

But, no; like a soft gush of sunlight, like bells and clear, running water, the first room greeted him in a medley of untraceable associations. It was the first room, with the delicate cane-seated chairs and settees, the red lacquer and the glass, all looking lovelier than ever against the panelled white, all brighter, sweeter, happier than in the rather dim room on the ground floor in Chislebridge. And touches of green, like tiny flakes of vivid flame, went through it in the leaves of the white azaleas that filled the jars and vases. He saw it all, and he saw, as Mrs. Waterlow came toward him, that the white pagoda stood on its former little black lacquer table in one of the windows.

Mrs. Waterlow shook his hand and her eyes examined him.

"You have been ill. I was so sorry to hear," she said.

"Yes, I've been wretchedly ill; for years now, it seems," he replied.

They sat down before the fire. Old Mrs. Waterlow, she told him, was away on a visit to Chislebridge, from which she was to return that evening at six o'clock. It was only four. He had two hours before him, and he felt that in them he was to be very happy. They talked and talked. He saw that she liked him and expected him to stay on and talk. All the magic and elation and sense of discovery and adventure was with him as on their first encounter. She knew him, he found, so much better than he could have guessed. She had read everything he had written. She appreciated so finely; she even, with a further advance to acknowledged friendship, criticized, with the precision and delicacy expressed in all that she did. And the fact that she liked him so much, that she was already so much his friend, gave him his right to let her see how much he liked her. The two hours were not only happy; they were the happiest he had ever known.

The clock had hardly struck six when old Mrs. Waterlow's cab drove up.

"Don't go; mamma will so like to see you," said Mrs. Waterlow. "She so enjoyed that little visit you paid her over a year ago, you know."

This was the first reference that had been made to the visit. He wondered if she guessed what it had done for their friendship.

Old Mrs. Waterlow came in, wearing just such a delightful, flowing black satin cloak and deep black satin bonnet as he would have expected her to wear. And seeing him there with her daughter-in-law, she paused, as if arrested, on the threshold. Then, her eyes passing from the tea-table and its intimacy of grouping with the two chairs they had risen from,

and resting brightly on her daughter's face, where she must read the reflection of his happiness, Owen saw that she cast off a scruple, came to a decision, and renewed the impulse that had brought her up the stairs, he now realised, at an uncharacteristic speed.

"My dear Cicely," she exclaimed, after she had greeted him, "you've lost your wager!"

Cicely Waterlow gazed at her for a moment and then she flushed deeply.

"Have I, mamma?" she said, busying herself with the kettle. "Well, that pleases you, and doesn't displease me. You'll want some tea, won't you?"

"Yes, indeed, I want some tea. But you'll not put me off with tea, my dear. I want to talk about my wager, too; and Mr. Stacpole will want to hear about it, for it was his wager as well. You did say that you felt convinced that I was safe in my haven, didn't you, Mr. Stacpole? Well, I've lost it, and I'm not at all pleased to have lost it. I'm triumphant, if you will, but savage, too. You'll forgive me, I know, Mr. Stacpole, if I'm savage with your cousin when I tell you that she has been inspired with a black satin suite and mahogany furniture and bead-work since seeing Cicely's new drawing-room in Chislebridge."

"Mamma!" Cicely protested. "Two people can perfectly well have the same idea at the same time! There's no reason in the world why Gwendolen shouldn't feel just my fancy for funny, old, ugly things."

"She didn't show any fancy for them when she saw them a year ago, did she, dear?" said the intractable old lady, seating herself at the tea-table. "She was very guarded, very mute, though very observant. Yes; people may have the same idea, but they'll hardly have the same black satin furniture and the same beaded footstools, will they?"

Seeing the deep embarrassment in which his friend was plunged, Owen now interposed.

"Don't try to defend Gwendolen on my account," he said. "She really can't be defended. I know it, for I've seen her drawing-room."

"You have seen it? And what do you think of it?" asked old Mrs. Waterlow.

"I thought, as I told her," said Owen, "that it lacked but one thing, and that was the travesty of a soul. It lacked the white pagoda."

"You told her that? It was what she told me. She told me that she could not forgive herself for having parted with the pagoda, for it was the travesty of a soul that her room still needed. 'You mean,' I said, 'the pagoda placed as Cicely placed it on the centre-table in her new room?' She gazed at me and laid her hand on my arm and asked: 'But, dear Mrs. Waterlow, how had Cicely placed the pagoda? I really don't remember. I really don't remember at all what Cicely's new room was like, except that it was mid-Victorian, and had old water-colours on the walls. Surely you don't think that I've copied Cicely?'

"My dear Mrs. Conyers,' I said to her, 'I don't think, but know, that you've done nothing else since you came to Chislebridge. But in this case you are farther from success than usual, for Cicely's drawing-room is gay, and yours is _grand sérieux_.'"

Mrs. Waterlow's bomb seemed to fill the air with a silvery explosion, and, as its echoes died, in the ensuing stillness, the eyes of Cicely and Owen met beneath the triumphant gaze of the merciless old lady. It was from his eyes that hers caught the infection. To remain grave now was to be _grand sérieux_, and helpless gaiety was in the air. Owen

broke into peals of laughter.

"Oh--but--" Cicely Waterlow protested, laughing, too, but still flushed and almost tearful--"it isn't fair. It's as if we had taken her in. She doesn't know she does it, really she doesn't; she is so well-meaning--so kind."

"She knows now," said old Mrs. Waterlow, who remained unsmiling, but with a placidity full of satisfaction; "and she'll hardly be able to forget."

"I'm quite sure," said Cicely, "that she really believes that she cares for the new drawing-room. People can persuade themselves so easily of new tastes. And why shouldn't they have them? I believe that Gwendolen does like it."

"Yes, she does indeed," said old Mrs. Waterlow. "She says so. She says she never cared for any room so much and that she intends to live and die with it. Her only refuge now is to go on faithfully loving it. So there she is, buttoned into her black satin for ever!"

* * * * *

Until now Mrs. Conyers has remained faithful, and her consistency is still made good to her; for none of her drawing-rooms has brought her such appreciation. Chislebridge has never dared to emulate it; Mr. Chambers and his friends have often painted it, and Mrs. Waterlow's original, like a gay jest, uttered and then gone for ever, is no longer in existence to vex and perplex her with its mocking smile. Moreover, her own drawing-room no longer lacks its travesty of a soul. Owen married Cicely Waterlow in the autumn, and Gwendolen, magnanimous, and burning her bridges behind her, sent them for their wedding-present her

two lovely and unique red lacquer cabinets. One stands in the front, and one in the back drawing-room in the little house in St. Leonard's Terrace, and Cicely said to Owen on the day they arrived that any wrong of the past, if wrong there had been, was now atoned for. And when they married and went round the world for their wedding-trip, they found in China a white pagoda, unflawed, larger, more sublimely elegant than the old one. This they brought back to Gwendolen, and with unfaltering courage she has placed it upon her mahogany centre table.

FOR LONE OF THE HILLS, by Susan Glaspell
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"Sure you're done with it?"

"Oh, yes," replied the girl, the suggestion of a smile on her face, and in her voice the suggestion of a tear. "Yes; I was just going."

But she did not go. She turned instead to the end of the alcove and sat down before a table placed by the window. Leaning her elbows upon it she looked about her through a blur of tears.

Seen through her own eyes of longing, it seemed that almost all of the people whom she could see standing before the files of the daily papers were homesick. The reading-room had been a strange study to her during those weeks spent in fruitless search for the work she wanted to do, and it had likewise proved a strange comfort. When tired and disconsolate and utterly sick at heart there was always one thing she could do--she could go down to the library and look at the paper from home. It was not that she wanted the actual news of Denver. She did not care in any vital way what the city officials were doing, what buildings were going up, or who was leaving town. She was only indifferently interested in the fires and the murders. She wanted the comforting companionship of that paper from home.

It seemed there were many to whom the papers offered that same sympathy, companionship, whatever it might be. More than anything else it perhaps gave to them--the searchers, drifters--a sense of anchorage. She would not soon forget the day she herself had stumbled in there and found the home paper. Chicago had given her nothing but rebuffs that day, and in desperation, just because she must go somewhere, and did not want to go back to her boarding-place, she had

hunted out the city library. It was when walking listlessly about in the big reading-room it had occurred to her that perhaps she could find the paper from home; and after that when things were their worst, when her throat grew tight and her eyes dim, she could always comfort herself by saying: "After a while I'll run down and look at the paper."

But to-night it had failed her. It was not the paper from home to-night; it was just a newspaper. It did not inspire the belief that things would be better to-morrow, that it must all come right soon. It left her as she had come---heavy with the consciousness that in her purse was eleven dollars, and that that was every cent she had in the whole world.

It was hard to hold back the tears as she dwelt upon the fact that it was very little she had asked of Chicago. She had asked only a chance to do the work for which she was trained, in order that she might go to the art classes at night. She had read in the papers of that mighty young city of the Middle West--the heart of the continent--of its brawn and its brain and its grit. She had supposed that Chicago, of all places, would appreciate what she wanted to do. The day she drew her hard-earned one hundred dollars from the bank in Denver--how the sun had shone that day in Denver, how clear the sky had been, and how bracing the air!--she had quite taken it for granted that her future was assured. And now, after tasting for three weeks the cruelty of indifference, she looked back to those visions with a hard little smile.

She rose to go, and in so doing her eyes fell upon the queer little woman to whom she had yielded her place before the Denver paper. Submerged as she had been in her own desolation she had given no heed to the small figure which came slipping along beside her beyond the bare thought that she was queer-looking. But as her eyes rested upon her now there was something about the woman which held her.

She was a strange little figure. An old-fashioned shawl was pinned tightly about her shoulders, and she was wearing a queer, rusty little bonnet. Her hair was rolled up in a small knot at the back of her head. She did not look as though she belonged in Chicago. And then, as the girl stood there looking at her, she saw the thin shoulders quiver, and after a minute the head that was wearing the rusty bonnet went down into the folds of the Denver paper.

The girl's own eyes filled, and she turned to go. It seemed she could scarcely bear her own unhappiness that day, without coming close to the heartache of another. But when she reached the end of the alcove she glanced back, and the sight of that shabby, bent figure, all alone before the Denver paper, was not to be withstood.

"I am from Colorado, too," she said softly, laying a hand upon the bent shoulders.

The woman looked up at that and took the girl's hand in both of her thin, trembling ones. It was a wan and a troubled face she lifted, and there was something about the eyes which would not seem to have been left there by tears alone.

"And do you have a pining for the mountains?" she whispered, with a timid eagerness. "Do you have a feeling that you want to see the sun go down behind them tonight and that you want to see the darkness come stealing up to the tops?"

The girl half turned away, but she pressed the woman's hand tightly in hers. "I know what you mean," she murmured.

"I wanted to see it so bad," continued the woman, tremulously, "that something just drove me here to this paper. I knowed it was here

because my nephew's wife brought me here one day and we come across it. We took this paper at home for more 'an twenty years. That's why I come. 'Twas the closest I could get."

"I know what you mean," said the girl again, unsteadily.

"And it's the closest I will ever get!" sobbed the woman.

"Oh, don't say that," protested the girl, brushing away her own tears, and trying to smile; "you'll go back home some day."

The woman shook her head. "And if I should," she said, "even if I should, 'twill be too late."

"But it couldn't be too late," insisted the girl. "The mountains, you know, will be there forever."

"The mountains will be there forever," repeated the woman, musingly; "yes, but not for me to see." There was a pause. "You see,"--she said it quietly--"I'm going blind."

The girl took a quick step backward, then stretched out two impulsive hands. "Oh, no, no you're not! Why--the doctors, you know, they do everything now."

The woman shook her head. "That's what I thought when I come here. That's why I come. But I saw the biggest doctor of them all today--they all say he's the best there is--and he said right out 'twas no use to do anything. He said 'twas--hopeless."

Her voice broke on that word. "You see," she hurried on, "I wouldn't care so much, seems like I wouldn't care 't all, if I could get there first! If I could see the sun go down behind them just one

night! If I could see the black shadows come slippin' over 'em just once! And then, if just one morning--just once!--I could get up and see the sunlight come a streamin'--oh, you know how it looks! You know what 'tis I want to see!"

"Yes; but why can't you? Why not? You won't go--your eyesight will last until you get back home, won't it?"

"But I can't go back home; not now."

"Why not?" demanded the girl. "Why can't you go home?"

"Why, there ain't no money, my dear," she explained, patiently. "It's a long way off--Colorado is, and there ain't no money. Now, George--George is my brother-in-law--he got me the money to come; but you see it took it all to come here, and to pay them doctors with. And George--he ain't rich, and it pinched him hard for me to come--he says I'll have to wait until he gets money laid up again, and--well he can't tell just when 't will be. He'll send it soon as he gets it," she hastened to add.

"But what are you going to do in the meantime? It would cost less to get you home than to keep you here."

"No, I stay with my nephew here. He's willin' I should stay with him till I get my money to go home."

"Yes, but this nephew, can't he get you the money? Doesn't he know," she insisted, heatedly, "what it means to you?"

"He's got five children, and not much laid up. And then, he never seen the mountains. He doesn't know what I mean when I try to tell him about gettin' there in time. Why, he says there's many a one

living back in the mountains would like to be livin' here. He don't understand--my nephew don't," she added, apologetically.

"Well, _someone_ ought to understand!" broke from the girl. "I understand! But--" she did her best to make it a laugh--"eleven dollars is every cent I've got in the world!"

"Don't!" implored the woman, as the girl gave up trying to control the tears. "Now, don't you be botherin'. I didn't mean to make you feel so bad. My nephew says I ain't reasonable, and maybe I ain't."

The girl raised her head. "But you _are_ reasonable. I tell you, you _are_ reasonable!"

"I must be going back," said the woman, uncertainly. "I'm just making you feel bad, and it won't do no good. And then they may be stirred up about me. Emma--Emma's my nephew's wife--left me at the doctor's office 'cause she had some trading to do, and she was to come back there for me. And then, as I was sittin' there, the pinin' came over me so strong it seemed I just must get up and start! And"---she smiled wanly---"this was far as I got."

"Come over and sit down by this table," said the girl, impulsively, "and tell me a little about your home back in the mountains. Wouldn't you like to?"

The woman nodded gratefully. "Seems most like getting back to them to find someone that knows about them," she said, after they had drawn their chairs up to the table and were sitting there side by side.

The girl put her rounded hand over on the thin, withered one. "Tell me about it," she said again.

"Maybe it wouldn't be much interesting to you, my dear. It's just a common life--mine is. You see, William and I--William was my husband--we went to Georgetown before it really was any town at all. Years and years before the railroad went through, we was there. Was you ever there?" she asked wistfully.

"Oh, very often," replied the girl. "I love every inch of that country!"

A tear stole down the woman's face. "It's most like being home to find someone that knows about it," she whispered.

"Yes, William and I went there when 'twas all new country," she went on, after a pause. "We worked hard, and we laid up a little money. Then, three years ago, William took sick. He was sick for a year, and we had to live up most of what we'd saved. That's why I ain't got none now. It ain't that William didn't provide."

The girl nodded.

"We seen some hard days. But we was always harmonious--William and I was. And William had a great fondness for the mountains. The night before he died he made them take him over by the window and he looked out and watched the darkness come stealin' over the daylight--you know how it does in them mountains. 'Mother,' he said to me--his voice was that low I could no more 'an hear what he said--'I'll never see another sun go down, but I'm thankful I seen this one.'"

She was crying outright now, and the girl did not try to stop her.

"And that's the reason I love the mountains," she whispered at last.

"It ain't just that they're grand and wonderful to look at. It ain't just the things them tourists sees to talk about. But the mountains has always been like a comfortin' friend to me. John and Sarah is buried there--John and Sarah is my two children that died of fever. And then William is there--like I just told you. And the mountains was a comfort to me in all those times of trouble. They're like an old friend. Seems like they're the best friend I've got on earth."

"I know what you mean," said the girl, brokenly. "I know all about it."

"And you don't think I'm just notional," she asked wistfully, "in pinin' to get back while--whilst I can look at them?"

The girl held the old hand tightly in hers with a clasp more responsive than words.

"It ain't but I'd know they was there. I could feel they was there all right, but"--her voice sank with the horror of it--"I'm 'fraid I might forget just how they look!"

"Oh, but you won't," the girl assured her. "You'll remember just how they look."

"I'm scared of it. I'm scared there might be something I'd forget. And so I just torment myself thinkin'--'Now do I remember this? Can I see just how that looks?' That's the way I got to thinkin' up in the doctor's office, when he told me there was nothing to do, and I was so worked up it seemed I must get up and start!"

"You must try not to worry about it," murmured the girl. "You'll remember."

"Well, maybe so. Maybe I will. But that's why I want just one more look. If I could look once more I'd remember it forever. You see I'd look to remember it, and I would. And do you know--seems like I wouldn't mind going blind so much then? When I'd sit facin' them I'd just say to myself: 'Now I know just how they look. I'm seeing them just as if I had my eyes!' The doctor says my sight'll just kind of slip away, and when I look my last look, when it gets dimmer and dimmer to me, I want the last thing I see to be them mountains where William and me worked and was so happy! Seems like I can't bear it to have my sight slip away here in Chicago, where there's nothing I want to look at! And then to have a little left--to have just a little left!--and to know I could see if I was there to look--and to know that when I get there 'twill be--Oh, I'll be rebellious-like here--and I'd be contented there! I don't want to be complainin'--I don't want to!--but when I've only got a little left I want it--oh, I want it for them things I want to see!"

"You will see them," insisted the girl passionately. "I'm not going to believe the world can be so hideous as that!"

"Well, maybe so," said the woman, rising. "But I don't know where 'twill come from," she added doubtfully.

She took her back to the doctor's office and left her in the care of the stolid Emma. "Seems most like I'd been back home," she said in parting; and the girl promised to come and see her and talk with her about the mountains. The woman thought that talking about them would help her to remember just how they looked.

And then the girl returned to the library. She did not know why she did so. In truth she scarcely knew she was going there until she found herself sitting before that same secluded table at which she and the woman had sat a little while before. For a long time she sat

there with her head in her hands, tears falling upon a pad of yellow paper on the table before her.

Finally she dried her eyes, opened her purse, and counted her money. It seemed that out of her great desire, out of her great new need, there must be more than she had thought. But there was not, and she folded her hands upon the two five-dollar bills and the one silver dollar and looked hopelessly about the big room.

She had forgotten her own disappointments, her own loneliness. She was oblivious to everything in the world now save what seemed the absolute necessity of getting the woman back to the mountains while she had eyes to see them.

But what could she do? Again she counted the money. She could make herself, some way or other, get along without one of the five-dollar bills, but five dollars would not take one very close to the mountains. It was at that moment that she saw a man standing before the Denver paper, and noticed that another man was waiting to take his place. The one who was reading had a dinner pail in his hand. The clothes of the other told that he, too, was of the world's workers. It was clear to the girl that the man at the file was reading the paper from home; and the man who was ready to take his place looked as if waiting for something less impersonal than the news of the day.

The idea came upon her with such suddenness, so full born, that it made her gasp. They--the people who came to read the Denver paper, the people who loved the mountains and were far from them, the people who were themselves homesick and full of longing--were the people to understand.

It took her but a minute to act. She put the silver dollar and one

five-dollar bill back in her purse. She clutched the other bill in her left hand, picked up a pencil, and began to write. She headed the petition: "To all who know and love the mountains," and she told the story with the simpleness of one speaking from the heart, and the directness of one who speaks to those sure to understand. "And so I found her here by the Denver paper," she said, after she had stated the tragic facts, "because it was the closest she could come to the mountains. Her heart is not breaking because she is going blind. It is breaking because she may never again look with seeing eyes upon those great hills which rise up about her home. We must do it for her simply because we would wish that, under like circumstances, someone would do it for us. She belongs to us because we understand.

"If you can only give fifty cents, please do not hold it back because it seems but little. Fifty cents will take her twenty miles nearer home--twenty miles closer to the things upon which she longs that her last seeing glance may fall."

After she had written it she rose, and, the five-dollar bill in one hand, the sheets of yellow paper in the other, walked down the long room to the desk at which one of the librarians sat. The girl's cheeks were very red, her eyes shining as she poured out the story. They mingled their tears, for the girl at the desk was herself young and far from home, and then they walked back to the Denver paper and pinned the sheets of yellow paper just above the file. At the bottom of the petition the librarian wrote: "Leave your money at the desk in this room. It will be properly attended to." The girl from Colorado then turned over her five-dollar bill and passed out into the gathering night.

Her heart was brimming with joy. "I can get a cheaper boarding place," she told herself, as she joined the home-going crowds, "and

until something else turns up I'll just look around and see if I can't get a place in a store."

* * * * *

One by one they had gathered around while the woman was telling the story. "And so, if you don't mind," she said, in conclusion, "I'd like to have you put in a little piece that I got to Denver safe, so's they can see it. They was all so worked up about when I'd get here. Would that cost much?" she asked timidly.

"Not a cent," said the city editor, his voice gruff with the attempt to keep it steady.

"You might say, if it wouldn't take too much room, that I was much pleased with the prospect of getting home before sundown to-night."

"You needn't worry but what we'll say it all," he assured her. "We'll say a great deal more than you have any idea of."

"I'm very thankful to you," she said, as she rose to go.

They sat there for a moment in silence. "When one considers," someone began, "that they were people who were pushed too close even to subscribe to a daily paper--"

"When one considers," said the city editor, "that the girl who started it had just eleven dollars to her name--" And then he, too, stopped abruptly and there was another long moment of silence.

After that he looked around at the reporters. "Well, it's too bad you can't all have it, when it's so big a chance, but I guess it falls logically to Raymond. And in writing it, just remember,

Raymond, that the biggest stories are not written about wars, or about politics, or even murders. The biggest stories are written about the things which draw human beings closer together. And the chance to write them doesn't come every day, or every year, or every lifetime. And I'll tell you, boys, all of you, when it seems sometimes that the milk of human kindness has all turned sour, just think back to the little story you heard this afternoon."

* * * * *

Slowly the sun slipped down behind the mountains; slowly the long purple shadows deepened to black; and with the coming of the night there settled over the everlasting hills, and over the soul of one who had returned to them, that satisfying calm that men call peace.

THE STRING QUARTET, by Virginia Woolf
from The Project Gutenberg Ebook #29220, *Monday or Tuesday*

Well, here we are, and if you cast your eye over the room you will see that Tubes and trams and omnibuses, private carriages not a few, even, I venture to believe, landaus with bays in them, have been busy at it, weaving threads from one end of London to the other. Yet I begin to have my doubts--

If indeed it's true, as they're saying, that Regent Street is up, and the Treaty signed, and the weather not cold for the time of year, and even at that rent not a flat to be had, and the worst of influenza its after effects; if I bethink me of having forgotten to write about the leak in the larder, and left my glove in the train; if the ties of blood require me, leaning forward, to accept cordially the hand which is perhaps offered hesitatingly--

"Seven years since we met!"

"The last time in Venice."

"And where are you living now?"

"Well, the late afternoon suits me the best, though, if it weren't asking too much----"

"But I knew you at once!"

"Still, the war made a break----"

If the mind's shot through by such little arrows, and--for human society compels it--no sooner is one launched than another presses forward; if

this engenders heat and in addition they've turned on the electric light; if saying one thing does, in so many cases, leave behind it a need to improve and revise, stirring besides regrets, pleasures, vanities, and desires--if it's all the facts I mean, and the hats, the fur boas, the gentlemen's swallow-tail coats, and pearl tie-pins that come to the surface--what chance is there?

Of what? It becomes every minute more difficult to say why, in spite of everything, I sit here believing I can't now say what, or even remember the last time it happened.

"Did you see the procession?"

"The King looked cold."

"No, no, no. But what was it?"

"She's bought a house at Malmesbury."

"How lucky to find one!"

On the contrary, it seems to me pretty sure that she, whoever she may be, is damned, since it's all a matter of flats and hats and sea gulls, or so it seems to be for a hundred people sitting here well dressed, walled in, furred, replete. Not that I can boast, since I too sit passive on a gilt chair, only turning the earth above a buried memory, as we all do, for there are signs, if I'm not mistaken, that we're all recalling something, furtively seeking something. Why fidget? Why so anxious about the sit of cloaks; and gloves--whether to button or unbutton? Then watch that elderly face against the dark canvas, a moment ago urbane and flushed; now taciturn and sad, as if in shadow. Was it the sound of the second violin tuning in the ante-room? Here they come; four black figures, carrying instruments, and seat themselves facing

the white squares under the downpour of light; rest the tips of their bows on the music stand; with a simultaneous movement lift them; lightly poise them, and, looking across at the player opposite, the first violin counts one, two, three----

Flourish, spring, burgeon, burst! The pear tree on the top of the mountain. Fountains jet; drops descend. But the waters of the Rhone flow swift and deep, race under the arches, and sweep the trailing water leaves, washing shadows over the silver fish, the spotted fish rushed down by the swift waters, now swept into an eddy where--it's difficult this--conglomeration of fish all in a pool; leaping, splashing, scraping sharp fins; and such a boil of current that the yellow pebbles are churned round and round, round and round--free now, rushing downwards, or even somehow ascending in exquisite spirals into the air; curled like thin shavings from under a plane; up and up.... How lovely goodness is in those who, stepping lightly, go smiling through the world! Also in jolly old fishwives, squatted under arches, obscene old women, how deeply they laugh and shake and rollick, when they walk, from side to side, hum, hah!

"That's an early Mozart, of course-----"

"But the tune, like all his tunes, makes one despair--I mean hope. What do I mean? That's the worst of music! I want to dance, laugh, eat pink cakes, yellow cakes, drink thin, sharp wine. Or an indecent story, now--I could relish that. The older one grows the more one likes indecency. Hah, hah! I'm laughing. What at? You said nothing, nor did the old gentleman opposite.... But suppose--suppose--Hush!"

The melancholy river bears us on. When the moon comes through the trailing willow boughs, I see your face, I hear your voice and the bird singing as we pass the osier bed. What are you whispering? Sorrow, sorrow. Joy, joy. Woven together, like reeds in moonlight. Woven

together, inextricably commingled, bound in pain and strewn in sorrow--crash!

The boat sinks. Rising, the figures ascend, but now leaf thin, tapering to a dusky wraith, which, fiery tipped, draws its twofold passion from my heart. For me it sings, unseals my sorrow, thaws compassion, floods with love the sunless world, nor, ceasing, abates its tenderness but deftly, subtly, weaves in and out until in this pattern, this consummation, the cleft ones unify; soar, sob, sink to rest, sorrow and joy.

Why then grieve? Ask what? Remain unsatisfied? I say all's been settled; yes; laid to rest under a coverlet of rose leaves, falling. Falling. Ah, but they cease. One rose leaf, falling from an enormous height, like a little parachute dropped from an invisible balloon, turns, flutters waveringly. It won't reach us.

"No, no. I noticed nothing. That's the worst of music--these silly dreams. The second violin was late, you say?"

"There's old Mrs. Munro, feeling her way out--blinder each year, poor woman--on this slippery floor."

Eyeless old age, grey-headed Sphinx.... There she stands on the pavement, beckoning, so sternly, the red omnibus.

"How lovely! How well they play! How--how--how!"

The tongue is but a clapper. Simplicity itself. The feathers in the hat next me are bright and pleasing as a child's rattle. The leaf on the plane-tree flashes green through the chink in the curtain. Very strange, very exciting.

"How--how--how!" Hush!

These are the lovers on the grass.

"If, madam, you will take my hand----"

"Sir, I would trust you with my heart. Moreover, we have left our bodies in the banqueting hall. Those on the turf are the shadows of our souls."

"Then these are the embraces of our souls." The lemons nod assent. The swan pushes from the bank and floats dreaming into mid stream.

"But to return. He followed me down the corridor, and, as we turned the corner, trod on the lace of my petticoat. What could I do but cry 'Ah!' and stop to finger it? At which he drew his sword, made passes as if he were stabbing something to death, and cried, 'Mad! Mad! Mad!'

Whereupon

I screamed, and the Prince, who was writing in the large vellum book in the oriel window, came out in his velvet skull-cap and furred slippers, snatched a rapier from the wall--the King of Spain's gift, you know--on which I escaped, flinging on this cloak to hide the ravages to my skirt--to hide.... But listen! the horns!"

The gentleman replies so fast to the lady, and she runs up the scale with such witty exchange of compliment now culminating in a sob of passion, that the words are indistinguishable though the meaning is plain enough--love, laughter, flight, pursuit, celestial bliss--all floated out on the gayest ripple of tender endearment--until the sound of the silver horns, at first far distant, gradually sounds more and more distinctly, as if seneschals were saluting the dawn or proclaiming ominously the escape of the lovers.... The green garden, moonlit pool, lemons, lovers, and fish are all dissolved in the opal sky, across which, as the horns are joined by trumpets and supported by clarions

there rise white arches firmly planted on marble pillars.... Tramp and trumpeting. Clang and clangour. Firm establishment. Fast foundations. March of myriads. Confusion and chaos trod to earth. But this city to which we travel has neither stone nor marble; hangs enduring; stands unshakable; nor does a face, nor does a flag greet or welcome. Leave then to perish your hope; droop in the desert my joy; naked advance. Bare are the pillars; auspicious to none; casting no shade; resplendent; severe. Back then I fall, eager no more, desiring only to go, find the street, mark the buildings, greet the applewoman, say to the maid who opens the door: A starry night.

"Good night, good night. You go this way?"

"Alas. I go that."

TUCKERED OUT. by Sarah Warner Brooks

Project Gutenberg's EBook #39815, *My Fire Opal, and Other Tales*

Hiram Fisher was "in for life," and had already served out twenty years of this hopeless term, when I made his acquaintance. From his forebears--a long line of Cape Cod fishermen--Hiram has inherited an inexhaustible stock of good nature, a well-knit frame, the muscle of an ox, and such an embarrassment of vitality, that even twenty years of bad air, meagre diet, and tiresome monotony, had not perceptibly loosened his grip on existence. For the last ten years of his term, he had been a "runner" in the prison, the right-hand man of the warden, the well approved of inferior officials, the universal favourite of convicts, and head singer in the chapel choir; and in all that time had never once broken a rule of the prison! A convict could no more; an angel might have accomplished less!

By what occult process a murderer had been evolved from material so seemingly impracticable--from a man of whom it might reasonably be predicated that he would not, of malice prepense, destroy a fly--let the sages tell us; the riddle is far beyond my poor reading. All the same, it was for murder, and in the first degree, that Hiram Fisher had been sentenced. The particulars of his crime were to be had for the asking, of any garrulous prison official, yet I was too incurious of detail to ask for them.

If "accidents"--as the proverb goes--"happen in the best of families," the worst may not hope to escape; and, one day, by some luckless misstep on the iron stairway of the prison, Hiram got a fall which, had Destiny consented, might have broken his neck. As it was, he was picked up in the corridor, unconscious and much bruised in body, and taken for repair to the prison hospital; and it was there that we became fast friends. It was to relieve the tedium of a long bout of reclining, with one leg inflexibly incased in plaster, that I

undertook, for Hiram's sole benefit, the reading of a Dickens's Christmas Carol, which had found great favour with the convalescents gathered about the stove for the weekly hospital reading.

Before I had gone through the first half dozen pages, it became evident that Hiram, though, like most New Englanders of his class, tolerably conversant with the three Rs, had no possible use for literature of any sort. I went on half-heartedly to the bitter end, and closing the book, to his apparent relief, resolved, in my after intercourse with the patient, to confine myself strictly to conversation. After this we changed places. Hiram held forth, and I became the much entertained listener. With that easy yarn-spinning felicity, inherent in the born sailor, the patient reeled off for me so interminable a string of incident, anecdote, and heart-moving outside adventure, with such rare and racy sketches of prison life, that my Mondays (Monday was hospital day with me) became, throughout his entire convalescence, like an unbroken series of "Arabian Nights."

Notable among Hiram's hospital recitals was the little sketch which follows, and which I have attempted to reproduce (as nearly as is possible from memory) in his own quaint and homely dialect.

THE TUCKERED-OUT MAN.

"Well, arter I'd been in the 'palace'[1] somewhere 'bout ten year, I got a leetle peaked-like, an' the doctor he overhauled me, an' sent me up t' the hospital for a spell. I wa'n't sick enough to be in bed, so, daytimes, I sot in the big room, 'round the stove, along with half a dozen mates who was 'bout in the same condition.

[1] Convicts' term for prison.

"It was winter weather, an' pesky cold, too, I _tell_ you! We wa'n't none on us gin leave to talk, which, to be sure, was all right enough, though I must say it dooz come pleggy hard to set long side o' folks all day long 'thout openin' your head. But, anyhow, we wa'n't blindfolded, and didn't have our ears plugged neither.

"So while I sot there days, dull as a hoe, an' fur all the world like the man in the Scriptur', that had a dumb devil, I used naterally to twig what was goin' on in most parts o' the buildin'. Well, long 'bout that time we had a new chaplain t' the 'palace,' an' a middlin' good Christian he was, too, I should say; an' bein' a bran-new broom, he naterally swep' cleaner than the old one. Now the _old_ chaplain, he was a master hand at prayin', an' sich like.

"Why, to hear him pray fur that instertooshing would melt a heart o' stun! and his sermons, I will say, was spun out be-eutiful! Arter that, he 'peared 'bout blowed out, an', week-days, we mostly had to look arter our own souls. Well, the new chaplain, you see, _he_ was different. He b'leaved in keeping up steam right straight along, so he used ter visit the men in their cells, an' kinder try to keep 'em on a slant towards the kingdom, all the week round.

"He was mighty good to the sick, too, an' there wa'n't a man in that hospital so bad 'at he wouldn't do him a good turn; an' besides writin' letters fur the men (which is no more'n 's expected on him), he used to do little arrants fur 'em outside, sich as lookin' arter their children, or huntin' up their relations, when they happened to lose the run on 'em. I heerd the warden, one day, a sayin' to one o' the inspectors, 'Our chaplain's too kind-hearted, he'll wear hisself out.' Thinks I ter myself, 'No, he won't, you _bet_! fur, arter a spell, he'll git callous like all the rest on yer.' A prison, ye see, 's a master place fur makin' folks callous. But I'm gittin' ahead o' my story.

"Well, one day I sot there by the stove, squintin' round, an' with both ears open, an' I see the new chaplain come in. He shook hands with us fellers in the big room, an' then he went round to all the cells an' talked with the patients. I see him look into No. --; the bed was made up spic an' span, an' no signs o' anybody inside, so he come away, an' sot down t'other side o' the room, a talkin' to the hospital super.

"I kinder kep' my eye on that cell, fur I knowed there'd been a feller brought up that mornin', an' ef I wa'n't very much mistaken he'd been put in No. --. Well, by'm by, I seed suthin' away over in the further corner of No. --, an' pooty soon it riz up.

"Lord sakes! how I should a hollered, ef I'd 'a' dared, when that creetur stood on its two feet, an' tiptoed forrard into the light, the very spawn o' one o' them little bogles my granny used to tell about! I should say he wa'n't more'n four feet six, in his shoes, an' bein' a good deal bent up, he didn't look nigh so tall as he was; an' sich eyes I never _did_ see in a man's head! Black as coals, an' bright as beads; an' sich a hankerin' look, a way down in 'em, as ef he'd been a s'archin' fur somethin' he wanted ever sence the flood, an' hadn't found it yit, an' didn't 'spect to find it in this world nor t'other!

"Well, he looked round a spell, kinder skeert, an' then he skulked out inter the passage an' come down-stairs, an' arter he'd twigged a minnit he comes straight up to the chaplain, an' teches him on the shoulder. The chaplain he turned round an' kinder gin a start, an' then sez he to the super, 'What's the matter with this poor feller?' sez he. Afore he could answer, the little bogle he steps forrard, an' sez he, 'Doctor, don't give _me_ any o' your physic, keep it for _t' others_. Doctor-stuff won't do _me_ no good. _I'm_ tuckered out! _'

"The super he teched his forrard, an' gin the chaplain a side look, an' sez he, 'Ah, yes, I see!' An' then, willin' to pacify the poor creetur, he turns to him as pleasant as can be, an' sez he, 'You mistake me, my friend, I'm not the doctor, but all the same I've come here to help you, an' what may I do fur you to-day?' The little feller looked at him a minnit, kinder troubled like, an' then he fetched a sigh, and shook his head, an' sez he, 'Physic's _no use_, I'm _tuckered out_!' 'But mebbe now,' sez the chaplain, 'I may be able to do some little thing fur you outside. Ain't there some one there you'd like a visit from now?' sez he.

"'Outside?--_out--side?_' sez the little man, puttin' his skinny hand to his forrard, as ef he wanted to remember suthin', but couldn't fur the life on him. 'Out--_side--o-u-t--side? Du tell, is it there, _now_? I wouldn't 'a' thought it, though; I ain't heerd nothin' on it fur--fur--countin' his lean fingers, an' rubbin' his forrard again--'fur fifteen year!

"'_Outside, eh?_ an' is Deely there now? She was a hansum gal when I merried her. I sot the world by Deely! Le's see; she was goin' to Californy, Deely was. I wonder if she's got there yit? I hain't heerd a word from her fur fifteen year. But Benjy knows all about her. Benjy's my fust cousin, doctor. He said he'd come an' see me, but he hain't come yit. He's busy, I s'pose, and can't git time.' An' arter he'd fumbled a spell in his breast-pocket, he pulled out a dirty scrap o' paper with some writin' on it, an' handin' on it to the chaplain, sez he, '_That's_ where Benjy lives, doctor. He said he'd come an' see me, an' let me know 'bout _her_'; an' I've waited fifteen year, doctor, an' all that time I hain't heerd a word from Deely! Mebbe,' sez he, lookin' into the chaplain's face kinder wishful, 'Mebbe sometime you'd go an' see Benjy _fur_ me, and ask him if he's ever heerd from Deely sence she started for Californy. Fifteen year's a long spell to wait,' sez he, heavin' another sigh, 'an' I'm clean

tuckered out.' I seen a tear drop on to the chaplain's white necktie, an' sez I to myself, 'he's a thinkin' o' his _own_ wife' (a pretty, chipper little lady she was, too,--I see her one day in chapel), an' sez I, '_he'll go!_'

"Well, the super, he told the little tuckered-out creetur to go back to his cell. So he crep' back, as still as a mouse. He didn't lay down, fur I watched him. He skulked into a corner, an' crouched down on the floor ezactly as ef he was tryin' to tie himself up into a hard knot, an' there he staid, as still as a stun image. Arter that, I heerd the super tellin' the chaplain that the man had turns o' bein' out o' his head, an' he'd come up to be treated fur it.

"His name,' sez he, 'is David Sweeney. He's an American, an' in fur twenty year fur highway robbery. No mortal knows how he come to do it,' sez he, 'for he had a good trade, an' plenty o' work at it, an' had allers borne a good character, an', only three months before, he'd married the very girl he wanted, Delia White, as pretty as a pink, an' smart as a steel trap. Some folks thought _she_ might 'a' ben at the bottom on't, for she was a toppin' gal, an' mighty fond o' gew-gaws, an' he'd 'a' cut off his right hand to please her. I should say she turned out a poor bargain, anyhow, for he's never set eyes on her sence he come to the prison. I remember folks pitied the poor feller a good deal at the time, for he was young an' this was his first offence; but highway robbery's bad business,' sez he, 'an' if a man _will_ foller it, why then let him take the consequences, _I_ say.' Next arternoon the chaplain he come up to the hospital agin', an' went in an' talked a spell with the little tuckered-out man. I couldn't hear what he said, but arterwards I heerd him tell the super how he'd been to hunt up the 'fust cousin' who, as nigh as he could come at it, kep' a grocery store on Cambridge Street fifteen year ago; but he'd moved to Vermont, bag an' baggage, years ago, an' nobody round there had heerd a lisp from him sence. Well, next day Deely's husband got

wild as a hawk, an' had to be locked up in his cell, an' afore he was fit to go round loose again I'd got peart, an' gone down. An' purty pleased I was, too, I tell you, for the warden he gin me a runner's berth, an' that ain't to be sneezed at. Well, I should say it wa'n't more'n six months arter that, when long in the edge o' the evenin' I was sent up in the third tier of the north wing to kerry some apples that one o' the instructors had brought in for a prisoner belongin' to his shop. When I come to the right door I was goin' to hand 'em through the gratin', but, not seein' nobody, I coughed to let the feller know I was there; an' then, hearin' a rustlin' over on the bed, I peeked in, an there, as sure as eggs, was the little 'tuckered-out' man, tied in the same old hard knot, an' with the same old, lonesome, hankerin' look on his wizened little face! When he heerd me, he riz up, and come forrard, an' when I gin him the apples he kinder perked up a minnit, but before I could turn round he drapped on to the bed agin as dismal as ever, an', as I come away, I heerd him a moanin' to hisself, 'O Lord! O Lord! tuckered out! tuckered out!'

"Well, arter that, I seen him consider'ble, off an' on, an', somehow, he 'peared to take a shine to me, an' we got to be purty good friends. He wa'n't a grain out o' his head now, but uncommon dismal, an' enjoyed purty poor health, I should say from his looks, though he didn't complain to nobody. One night, long 'bout Christmas time, I was sent inter his wing on some arrant or other, an', as I was goin' kinder slow past his door, I see him beckoning to me. I wa'n't apt to go agin the rules, but, thinks I, 'twon't break nobody ef I stop a minnit, an' jest say a word to this poor creetur. So I looked sharp, an' seein' as nobody was twiggin' me, I went up to the gratin' an' shook hands with him, an' sez I, 'I hope I see you well, Sweeney.' Sez he, 'No, not _very_ well, Hiram, an' here's my goold ring,' sez he, 'an' I want you to keep it fur me. I sha'n't have no use fur it fur some time.' So he put the ring on the little finger o' my left hand, an' a tight squeeze it was, too. 'Twas real Guinny goold, with two

hearts, an' a 'D' cut inside on't. He wa'n't a grain flighty that night, but sich a sorrowful look as he gin me, when he put that ring on my finger, you never _did_ see. An' then he shook hands with me agin, an' sez he, 'How dretful long these nights be, Hiram. But they'll get shorter arter Christmas, won't they? Good-by, Hiram, God bless you!'

"Well, to make a long story short, next mornin' airly, while the men was bein' rung out, I was a settin' things to rights in the warden's office, when he comes runnin' in in a great fluster, an' sez he to the deputy, 'Sweeney's fell from the third corridor, an' I guess he's 'bout done for. He's up,' sez he, 'in the hospital. Send for the doctor, an' the crowner, too, as quick as possible.' I was dretful flurried, but I got through my work somehow, an' by'm by I went inside to clean up the passage, an' when I see some spots o' blood there, I knowed what _that_ meant. Arterwards, I heerd the warden an' the chaplain talkin' it over, an', as fur as I could larn, the little 'tuckered-out' man never spoke to nobody arter they took him up, though he lived half an hour. The crowners they sot on him, an' brung in a verdick of '_death by accident_', but _I_ hed his goold ring on my finger, an' I knew all about _Deely_. 'An', sez I to myself, 'some accidents is _done_ a _purpose_, I reckon!'

"Next day was Friday, an' a feller who'd had a visit from his sister come along feelin' purty chipper, with a big bowkay in his fist. He pulled out a spice pink an' a couple o' sprigs o' rose geranium, an' gin 'em to me, an', thinkin' they might come in play, I put 'em by, in a bottle o' water.

"Well, long in the forenoon, I had to kerry some truck to the hospital, an' I took my little posy along. There stood the coffin, all ready for Tewksbury, for the warden was away that day, and they wa'n't goin' to have service over the body, as most ginerally they do. I

asked the super ef I might look at the corpse, and sez he, 'Certainly, Hiram,' an' he steps up to the coffin an' lifts the forrard kiver, an' bless me! ef I wa'n't beat! There lay the little 'tuckered-out' man, as smilin' as a basket o' chips!

"I suppose I 'peared kinder took aback, for the super he says to me, sez he, 'Don't he look naterel to you, Hiram?' 'Nateral, sir?' sez I, 'an' _that contented_! Why, I never should ha' knowed him, ef I'd met him anywheres else!' Well, the super he kind er smiled, an' walked off, an' I stood there a minnit or so, a lookin' at the corpse, an' a thinkin'; an' sez I to myself, 'We know pleggy little 'bout t'other world _anyhow_. The Scripters, now,' sez I, '_doos_ say that arter death there ain't neither merryin' nor givin' in merrige. Howsomedever,' I sez, 'I'll put my spice pink an' my geranium sprigs inside the coffin.' An' I did. An' then I pulled off the goold ring with the two hearts an' the 'D' inside on't. 'Fur,' sez I, 'though I won't ezackly go agin Scriptor, I'm sartin sure that Sweeney wouldn't lay here _that_ smilin', ef he hadn't someways, in t'other world, got wind o' Deely.' So I slipped that ring on to his stiff merrige finger, an' as I shet the coffin up, an' come away, I e'en a'most thought I heerd him larf right out."

THE GARDEN LODGE, by Willa Cather

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When Caroline Noble's friends learned that Raymond d'Esquerre was to spend a month at her place on the Sound before he sailed to fill his engagement for the London opera season, they considered it another striking instance of the perversity of things. That the month was May, and the most mild and florescent of all the blue-and-white Mays the middle coast had known in years, but added to their sense of wrong. D'Esquerre, they learned, was ensconced in the lodge in the apple orchard, just beyond Caroline's glorious garden, and report went that at almost any hour the sound of the tenor's voice and of Caroline's crashing accompaniment could be heard floating through the open windows, out among the snowy apple boughs. The Sound, steel-blue and dotted with white sails, was splendidly seen from the windows of the lodge. The garden to the left and the orchard to the right had never been so riotous with spring, and had burst into impassioned bloom, as if to accommodate Caroline, though she was certainly the last woman to whom the witchery of Freya could be attributed; the last woman, as her friends affirmed, to at all adequately appreciate and make the most of such a setting for the great tenor.

Of course, they admitted, Caroline was musical—well, she ought to be!—but in that, as in everything, she was paramountly cool-headed, slow of impulse, and disgustingly practical; in that, as in everything else, she had herself so provokingly well in hand. Of course, it would be she, always mistress of herself in any situation, she, who would never be lifted one inch from the ground by it, and who would go on superintending her gardeners and workmen as usual—it would be she who got him. Perhaps some of them suspected that this was exactly why she did get him, and it but nettled them the more.

Caroline's coolness, her capableness, her general success, especially exasperated people because they felt that, for the most part, she had

made herself what she was; that she had cold-bloodedly set about complying with the demands of life and making her position comfortable and masterful. That was why, everyone said, she had married Howard Noble. Women who did not get through life so well as Caroline, who could not make such good terms either with fortune or their husbands, who did not find their health so unfailingly good, or hold their looks so well, or manage their children so easily, or give such distinction to all they did, were fond of stamping Caroline as a materialist, and called her hard.

The impression of cold calculation, of having a definite policy, which Caroline gave, was far from a false one; but there was this to be said for her—that there were extenuating circumstances which her friends could not know.

If Caroline held determinedly to the middle course, if she was apt to regard with distrust everything which inclined toward extravagance, it was not because she was unacquainted with other standards than her own, or had never seen another side of life. She had grown up in Brooklyn, in a shabby little house under the vacillating administration of her father, a music teacher who usually neglected his duties to write orchestral compositions for which the world seemed to have no especial need. His spirit was warped by bitter vindictiveness and puerile self-commiseration, and he spent his days in scorn of the labor that brought him bread and in pitiful devotion to the labor that brought him only disappointment, writing interminable scores which demanded of the orchestra everything under heaven except melody.

It was not a cheerful home for a girl to grow up in. The mother, who idolized her husband as the music lord of the future, was left to a lifelong battle with broom and dustpan, to neverending conciliatory overtures to the butcher and grocer, to the making of her own gowns and of Caroline's, and to the delicate task of mollifying Auguste's neglected pupils.

The son, Heinrich, a painter, Caroline's only brother, had inherited all his father's vindictive sensitiveness without his capacity for slavish application. His little studio on the third floor had been much frequented by young men as unsuccessful as himself, who met there to give themselves over to contemptuous derision of this or that artist whose industry and stupidity had won him recognition. Heinrich, when he worked at all, did newspaper sketches at twenty-five dollars a week. He was too indolent and vacillating to set himself seriously to his art, too irascible and poignantly self-conscious to make a living, too much addicted to lying late in bed, to the incontinent reading of poetry, and to the use of chloral to be anything very positive except painful. At twenty-six he shot himself in a frenzy, and the whole wretched affair had effectually shattered his mother's health and brought on the decline of which she died. Caroline had been fond of him, but she felt a certain relief when he no longer wandered about the little house, commenting ironically upon its shabbiness, a Turkish cap on his head and a cigarette hanging from between his long, tremulous fingers.

After her mother's death Caroline assumed the management of that bankrupt establishment. The funeral expenses were unpaid, and Auguste's pupils had been frightened away by the shock of successive disasters and the general atmosphere of wretchedness that pervaded the house. Auguste himself was writing a symphonic poem, *Icarus*, dedicated to the memory of his son. Caroline was barely twenty when she was called upon to face this tangle of difficulties, but she reviewed the situation candidly. The house had served its time at the shrine of idealism; vague, distressing, unsatisfied yearnings had brought it low enough. Her mother, thirty years before, had eloped and left Germany with her music teacher, to give herself over to lifelong, drudging bondage at the kitchen range. Ever since Caroline could remember, the law in the house had been a sort of mystic worship of things distant, intangible and unattainable. The family had lived in successive ebullitions of generous enthusiasm, in talk of masters and masterpieces, only to come down to the cold facts in the case; to boiled mutton and to the necessity of turning the dining-room carpet. All these

emotional pyrotechnics had ended in petty jealousies, in neglected duties, and in cowardly fear of the little grocer on the corner.

From her childhood she had hated it, that humiliating and uncertain existence, with its glib tongue and empty pockets, its poetic ideals and sordid realities, its indolence and poverty tricked out in paper roses. Even as a little girl, when vague dreams beset her, when she wanted to lie late in bed and commune with visions, or to leap and sing because the sooty little trees along the street were putting out their first pale leaves in the sunshine, she would clench her hands and go to help her mother sponge the spots from her father's waistcoat or press Heinrich's trousers. Her mother never permitted the slightest question concerning anything Auguste or Heinrich saw fit to do, but from the time Caroline could reason at all she could not help thinking that many things went wrong at home. She knew, for example, that her father's pupils ought not to be kept waiting half an hour while he discussed Schopenhauer with some bearded socialist over a dish of herrings and a spotted tablecloth. She knew that Heinrich ought not to give a dinner on Heine's birthday, when the laundress had not been paid for a month and when he frequently had to ask his mother for carfare. Certainly Caroline had served her apprenticeship to idealism and to all the embarrassing inconsistencies which it sometimes entails, and she decided to deny herself this diffuse, ineffectual answer to the sharp questions of life.

When she came into the control of herself and the house she refused to proceed any further with her musical education. Her father, who had intended to make a concert pianist of her, set this down as another item in his long list of disappointments and his grievances against the world. She was young and pretty, and she had worn turned gowns and soiled gloves and improvised hats all her life. She wanted the luxury of being like other people, of being honest from her hat to her boots, of having nothing to hide, not even in the matter of stockings, and she was willing to work for it. She rented a little studio away from that house of misfortune and began to

give lessons. She managed well and was the sort of girl people liked to help. The bills were paid and Auguste went on composing, growing indignant only when she refused to insist that her pupils should study his compositions for the piano. She began to get engagements in New York to play accompaniments at song recitals. She dressed well, made herself agreeable, and gave herself a chance. She never permitted herself to look further than a step ahead, and set herself with all the strength of her will to see things as they are and meet them squarely in the broad day. There were two things she feared even more than poverty: the part of one that sets up an idol and the part of one that bows down and worships it.

When Caroline was twenty-four she married Howard Noble, then a widower of forty, who had been for ten years a power in Wall Street. Then, for the first time, she had paused to take breath. It took a substantialness as unquestionable as his; his money, his position, his energy, the big vigor of his robust person, to satisfy her that she was entirely safe. Then she relaxed a little, feeling that there was a barrier to be counted upon between her and that world of visions and quagmires and failure.

Caroline had been married for six years when Raymond d'Esquerre came to stay with them. He came chiefly because Caroline was what she was; because he, too, felt occasionally the need of getting out of Klingsor's garden, of dropping down somewhere for a time near a quiet nature, a cool head, a strong hand. The hours he had spent in the garden lodge were hours of such concentrated study as, in his fevered life, he seldom got in anywhere. She had, as he told Noble, a fine appreciation of the seriousness of work.

One evening two weeks after d'Esquerre had sailed, Caroline was in the library giving her husband an account of the work she had laid out for the gardeners. She superintended the care of the grounds herself. Her garden, indeed, had become quite a part of her; a sort of beautiful adjunct, like gowns or jewels. It was a famous spot, and Noble was very proud of it.

"What do you think, Caroline, of having the garden lodge torn down and putting a new summer house there at the end of the arbor; a big rustic affair where you could have tea served in midsummer?" he asked.

"The lodge?" repeated Caroline looking at him quickly. "Why, that seems almost a shame, doesn't it, after d'Esquerre has used it?"

Noble put down his book with a smile of amusement.

"Are you going to be sentimental about it? Why, I'd sacrifice the whole place to see that come to pass. But I don't believe you could do it for an hour together."

"I don't believe so, either," said his wife, smiling.

Noble took up his book again and Caroline went into the music room to practice. She was not ready to have the lodge torn down. She had gone there for a quiet hour every day during the two weeks since d'Esquerre had left them. It was the sheerest sentiment she had ever permitted herself. She was ashamed of it, but she was childishly unwilling to let it go.

Caroline went to bed soon after her husband, but she was not able to sleep. The night was close and warm, presaging storm. The wind had fallen, and the water slept, fixed and motionless as the sand. She rose and thrust her feet into slippers and, putting a dressing gown over her shoulders, opened the door of her husband's room; he was sleeping soundly. She went into the hall and down the stairs; then, leaving the house through a side door, stepped into the vine-covered arbor that led to the garden lodge. The scent of the June roses was heavy in the still air, and the stones that paved the path felt pleasantly cool through the thin soles of her slippers. Heat-lightning flashed continuously from the bank of clouds that had gathered over the sea, but the shore was flooded with

moonlight and, beyond, the rim of the Sound lay smooth and shining. Caroline had the key of the lodge, and the door creaked as she opened it. She stepped into the long, low room radiant with the moonlight which streamed through the bow window and lay in a silvery pool along the waxed floor. Even that part of the room which lay in the shadow was vaguely illuminated; the piano, the tall candlesticks, the picture frames and white casts standing out as clearly in the half-light as did the sycamores and black poplars of the garden against the still, expectant night sky. Caroline sat down to think it all over. She had come here to do just that every day of the two weeks since d'Esquerre's departure, but, far from ever having reached a conclusion, she had succeeded only in losing her way in a maze of memories—sometimes bewilderingly confused, sometimes too acutely distinct—where there was neither path, nor clue, nor any hope of finality. She had, she realized, defeated a lifelong regimen; completely confounded herself by falling unaware and incontinently into that luxury of reverie which, even as a little girl, she had so determinedly denied herself, she had been developing with alarming celerity that part of one which sets up an idol and that part of one which bows down and worships it.

It was a mistake, she felt, ever to have asked d'Esquerre to come at all. She had an angry feeling that she had done it rather in self-defiance, to rid herself finally of that instinctive fear of him which had always troubled and perplexed her. She knew that she had reckoned with herself before he came; but she had been equal to so much that she had never really doubted she would be equal to this. She had come to believe, indeed, almost arrogantly in her own malleability and endurance; she had done so much with herself that she had come to think that there was nothing which she could not do; like swimmers, overbold, who reckon upon their strength and their power to hoard it, forgetting the ever-changing moods of their adversary, the sea.

And d'Esquerre was a man to reckon with. Caroline did not deceive herself now upon that score. She admitted it humbly enough, and since she had

said good-by to him she had not been free for a moment from the sense of his formidable power. It formed the undercurrent of her consciousness; whatever she might be doing or thinking, it went on, involuntarily, like her breathing, sometimes welling up until suddenly she found herself suffocating. There was a moment of this tonight, and Caroline rose and stood shuddering, looking about her in the blue duskiness of the silent room. She had not been here at night before, and the spirit of the place seemed more troubled and insistent than ever it had in the quiet of the afternoons. Caroline brushed her hair back from her damp forehead and went over to the bow window. After raising it she sat down upon the low seat. Leaning her head against the sill, and loosening her nightgown at the throat, she half-closed her eyes and looked off into the troubled night, watching the play of the heat-lightning upon the massing clouds between the pointed tops of the poplars.

Yes, she knew, she knew well enough, of what absurdities this spell was woven; she mocked, even while she winced. His power, she knew, lay not so much in anything that he actually had—though he had so much—or in anything that he actually was, but in what he suggested, in what he seemed picturesque enough to have or be and that was just anything that one chose to believe or to desire. His appeal was all the more persuasive and alluring in that it was to the imagination alone, in that it was as indefinite and impersonal as those cults of idealism which so have their way with women. What he had was that, in his mere personality, he quickened and in a measure gratified that something without which—to women—life is no better than sawdust, and to the desire for which most of their mistakes and tragedies and astonishingly poor bargains are due.

D'Esquerre had become the center of a movement, and the Metropolitan had become the temple of a cult. When he could be induced to cross the Atlantic, the opera season in New York was successful; when he could not, the management lost money; so much everyone knew. It was understood, too, that his superb art had disproportionately little to do with his peculiar

position. Women swayed the balance this way or that; the opera, the orchestra, even his own glorious art, achieved at such a cost, were but the accessories of himself; like the scenery and costumes and even the soprano, they all went to produce atmosphere, were the mere mechanics of the beautiful illusion.

Caroline understood all this; tonight was not the first time that she had put it to herself so. She had seen the same feeling in other people, watched for it in her friends, studied it in the house night after night when he sang, candidly putting herself among a thousand others.

D'Esquerre's arrival in the early winter was the signal for a feminine hegira toward New York. On the nights when he sang women flocked to the Metropolitan from mansions and hotels, from typewriter desks, schoolrooms, shops, and fitting rooms. They were of all conditions and complexions. Women of the world who accepted him knowingly as they sometimes took champagne for its agreeable effect; sisters of charity and overworked shopgirls, who received him devoutly; withered women who had taken doctorate degrees and who worshipped furtively through prism spectacles; business women and women of affairs, the Amazons who dwelt afar from men in the stony fastnesses of apartment houses. They all entered into the same romance; dreamed, in terms as various as the hues of fantasy, the same dream; drew the same quick breath when he stepped upon the stage, and, at his exit, felt the same dull pain of shouldering the pack again.

There were the maimed, even; those who came on crutches, who were pitted by smallpox or grotesquely painted by cruel birth stains. These, too, entered with him into enchantment. Stout matrons became slender girls again; worn spinsters felt their cheeks flush with the tenderness of their lost youth. Young and old, however hideous, however fair, they yielded up their heat—whether quick or latent—sat hungering for the mystic bread wherewith he fed them at this eucharist of sentiment.

Sometimes, when the house was crowded from the orchestra to the last row of the gallery, when the air was charged with this ecstasy of fancy, he himself was the victim of the burning reflection of his power. They acted upon him in turn; he felt their fervent and despairing appeal to him; it stirred him as the spring drives the sap up into an old tree; he, too, burst into bloom. For the moment he, too, believed again, desired again, he knew not what, but something.

But it was not in these exalted moments that Caroline had learned to fear him most. It was in the quiet, tired reserve, the dullness, even, that kept him company between these outbursts that she found that exhausting drain upon her sympathies which was the very pith and substance of their alliance. It was the tacit admission of disappointment under all this glamour of success—the helplessness of the enchanter to at all enchant himself—that awoke in her an illogical, womanish desire to in some way compensate, to make it up to him.

She had observed drastically to herself that it was her eighteenth year he awoke in her—those hard years she had spent in turning gowns and placating tradesmen, and which she had never had time to live. After all, she reflected, it was better to allow one's self a little youth—to dance a little at the carnival and to live these things when they are natural and lovely, not to have them coming back on one and demanding arrears when they are humiliating and impossible. She went over tonight all the catalogue of her self-deprivations; recalled how, in the light of her father's example, she had even refused to humor her innocent taste for improvising at the piano; how, when she began to teach, after her mother's death, she had struck out one little indulgence after another, reducing her life to a relentless routine, unvarying as clockwork. It seemed to her that ever since d'Esquerre first came into the house she had been haunted by an imploring little girlish ghost that followed her about, wringing its hands and entreating for an hour of life.

The storm had held off unconscionably long; the air within the lodge was stifling, and without the garden waited, breathless. Everything seemed pervaded by a poignant distress; the hush of feverish, intolerable expectation. The still earth, the heavy flowers, even the growing darkness, breathed the exhaustion of protracted waiting. Caroline felt that she ought to go; that it was wrong to stay; that the hour and the place were as treacherous as her own reflections. She rose and began to pace the floor, stepping softly, as though in fear of awakening someone, her figure, in its thin drapery, diaphanously vague and white. Still unable to shake off the obsession of the intense stillness, she sat down at the piano and began to run over the first act of the Walkure, the last of his roles they had practiced together; playing listlessly and absently at first, but with gradually increasing seriousness. Perhaps it was the still heat of the summer night, perhaps it was the heavy odors from the garden that came in through the open windows; but as she played there grew and grew the feeling that he was there, beside her, standing in his accustomed place. In the duet at the end of the first act she heard him clearly: "Thou art the Spring for which I sighed in Winter's cold embraces." Once as he sang it, he had put his arm about her, his one hand under her heart, while with the other he took her right from the keyboard, holding her as he always held Sieglinde when he drew her toward the window. She had been wonderfully the mistress of herself at the time; neither repellent nor acquiescent. She remembered that she had rather exulted, then, in her self-control—which he had seemed to take for granted, though there was perhaps the whisper of a question from the hand under her heart. "Thou art the Spring for which I sighed in Winter's cold embraces." Caroline lifted her hands quickly from the keyboard, and she bowed her head in them, sobbing.

The storm broke and the rain beat in, spattering her nightdress until she rose and lowered the windows. She dropped upon the couch and began fighting over again the battles of other days, while the ghosts of the slain rose as from a sowing of dragon's teeth, The shadows of things, always so

scorned and flouted, bore down upon her merciless and triumphant. It was not enough; this happy, useful, well-ordered life was not enough. It did not satisfy, it was not even real. No, the other things, the shadows-they were the realities. Her father, poor Heinrich, even her mother, who had been able to sustain her poor romance and keep her little illusions amid the tasks of a scullion, were nearer happiness than she. Her sure foundation was but made ground, after all, and the people in Klingsor's garden were more fortunate, however barren the sands from which they conjured their paradise.

The lodge was still and silent; her fit of weeping over, Caroline made no sound, and within the room, as without in the garden, was the blackness of storm. Only now and then a flash of lightning showed a woman's slender figure rigid on the couch, her face buried in her hands.

Toward morning, when the occasional rumbling of thunder was heard no more and the beat of the raindrops upon the orchard leaves was steadier, she fell asleep and did not waken until the first red streaks of dawn shone through the twisted boughs of the apple trees. There was a moment between world and world, when, neither asleep nor awake, she felt her dream grow thin, melting away from her, felt the warmth under her heart growing cold. Something seemed to slip from the clinging hold of her arms, and she groaned protestingly through her parted lips, following it a little way with fluttering hands. Then her eyes opened wide and she sprang up and sat holding dizzily to the cushions of the couch, staring down at her bare, cold feet, at her laboring breast, rising and falling under her open nightdress.

The dream was gone, but the feverish reality of it still pervaded her and she held it as the vibrating string holds a tone. In the last hour the shadows had had their way with Caroline. They had shown her the nothingness of time and space, of system and discipline, of closed doors and broad waters. Shuddering, she thought of the Arabian fairy tale in which the genie

brought the princess of China to the sleeping prince of Damascus and carried her through the air back to her palace at dawn. Caroline closed her eyes and dropped her elbows weakly upon her knees, her shoulders sinking together. The horror was that it had not come from without, but from within. The dream was no blind chance; it was the expression of something she had kept so close a prisoner that she had never seen it herself, it was the wail from the donjon deeps when the watch slept. Only as the outcome of such a night of sorcery could the thing have been loosed to straighten its limbs and measure itself with her; so heavy were the chains upon it, so many a fathom deep, it was crushed down into darkness. The fact that d'Esquerre happened to be on the other side of the world meant nothing; had he been here, beside her, it could scarcely have hurt her self-respect so much. As it was, she was without even the extenuation of an outer impulse, and she could scarcely have despised herself more had she come to him here in the night three weeks ago and thrown herself down upon the stone slab at the door there.

Caroline rose unsteadily and crept guiltily from the lodge and along the path under the arbor, terrified lest the servants should be stirring, trembling with the chill air, while the wet shrubbery, brushing against her, drenched her nightdress until it clung about her limbs.

At breakfast her husband looked across the table at her with concern. "It seems to me that you are looking rather fagged, Caroline. It was a beastly night to sleep. Why don't you go up to the mountains until this hot weather is over? By the way, were you in earnest about letting the lodge stand?"

Caroline laughed quietly. "No, I find I was not very serious. I haven't sentiment enough to forego a summer house. Will you tell Baker to come tomorrow to talk it over with me? If we are to have a house party, I should like to put him to work on it at once."

Noble gave her a glance, half-humorous, half-vexed. "Do you know I am

rather disappointed?" he said. "I had almost hoped that, just for once, you know, you would be a little bit foolish."

"Not now that I've slept over it," replied Caroline, and they both rose from the table, laughing.

The swift breezes on the beach at Pass Christian meet and conflict as though each strove for the mastery of the air. The land-breeze blows down through the pines, resinous, fragrant, cold, bringing breath-like memories of dim, dark woods shaded by myriad pine-needles. The breeze from the Gulf is warm and soft and languorous, blowing up from the south with its suggestion of tropical warmth and passion. It is strong and masterful, and tossed Annette's hair and whipped her skirts about her in bold disregard for the proprieties.

Arm in arm with Philip, she was strolling slowly down the great pier which extends from the Mexican Gulf Hotel into the waters of the Sound. There was no moon to-night, but the sky glittered and scintillated with myriad stars, brighter than you can ever see farther North, and the great waves that the Gulf breeze tossed up in restless profusion gleamed with the white fire of phosphorescent flame. The wet sands on the beach glowed white fire; the posts of the pier where the waves had leapt and left a laughing kiss, the sides of the little boats and fish-cars tugging at their ropes, alike showed white and flaming, as though the sea and all it touched were afire.

Annette and Philip paused midway the pier to watch two fishermen casting their nets. With heads bared to the breeze, they stood in clear silhouette against the white background of sea.

"See how he uses his teeth," almost whispered Annette.

Drawing himself up to his full height, with one end of the huge seine between his teeth, and the cord in his left hand, the taller fisherman of the two paused a half instant, his right arm extended, grasping the folds of the net. There was a swishing rush through the air, and it settled with a sort of

sob as it cut the waters and struck a million sparkles of fire from the waves. Then, with backs bending under the strain, the two men swung on the cord, drawing in the net, laden with glittering restless fish, which were unceremoniously dumped on the boards to be put into the fish-car awaiting them.

Philip laughingly picked up a soft, gleaming jelly-fish, and threatened to put it on Annette's neck. She screamed, ran, slipped on the wet boards, and in another instant would have fallen over into the water below. The tall fisherman caught her in his arms and set her on her feet.

"Mademoiselle must be very careful," he said in the softest and most correct French. "The tide is in and the water very rough. It would be very difficult to swim out there to-night."

Annette murmured confused thanks, which were supplemented by Philip's hearty tones. She was silent until they reached the pavilion at the end of the pier. The semi-darkness was unrelieved by lantern or light. The strong wind wafted the strains from a couple of mandolins, a guitar, and a tenor voice stationed in one corner to sundry engrossed couples in sundry other corners. Philip found an untenanted nook and they ensconced themselves therein.

"Do you know there's something mysterious about that fisherman?" said Annette, during a lull in the wind.

"Because he did not let you go over?" inquired Philip.

"No; he spoke correctly, and with the accent that goes only with an excellent education."

Philip shrugged his shoulders. "That's nothing remarkable. If you stay about Pass Christian for any length of time, you'll find more things than

perfect French and courtly grace among fishermen to surprise you. These are a wonderful people who live across the Lake."

Annette was lolling in the hammock under the big catalpa-tree some days later, when the gate opened, and Natalie's big sun-bonnet appeared. Natalie herself was discovered blushing in its dainty depths. She was only a little Creole seaside girl, you must know, and very shy of the city demoiselles. Natalie's patois was quite as different from Annette's French as it was from the postmaster's English.

"Mees Annette," she began, peony-hued all over at her own boldness, "we will have one lil' hay-ride this night, and a fish-fry at the end. Will you come?"

Annette sprang to her feet in delight. "Will I come? Certainly. How delightful! You are so good to ask me. What shall—what time—" But Natalie's pink bonnet had fled precipitately down the shaded walk. Annette laughed joyously as Philip lounged down the gallery.

"I frightened the child away," she told him.

You've never been for a hay-ride and fish-fry on the shores of the Mississippi Sound, have you? When the summer boarders and the Northern visitors undertake to give one, it is a comparatively staid affair, where due regard is had for one's wearing apparel, and where there are servants to do the hardest work. Then it isn't enjoyable at all. But when the natives, the boys and girls who live there, make up their minds to have fun, you may depend upon its being just the best kind.

This time there were twenty boys and girls, a mamma or so, several papas, and a grizzled fisherman to restrain the ardor of the amateurs. The cart was vast and solid, and two comfortable, sleepy-looking mules constituted the drawing power. There were also tin horns, some guitars, an

accordion, and a quartet of much praised voices. The hay in the bottom of the wagon was freely mixed with pine needles, whose prickiness through your hose was amply compensated for by its delicious fragrance.

After a triumphantly noisy passage down the beach one comes to the stretch of heavy sand that lies between Pass Christian proper and Henderson's Point. This is a hard pull for the mules, and the more ambitious riders get out and walk. Then, after a final strain through the shifting sands, bravo! the shell road is reached, and one goes cheering through the pine-trees to Henderson's Point.

If ever you go to Pass Christian, you must have a fish-fry at Henderson's Point. It is the pine-thicketed, white-beached peninsula jutting out from the land, with one side caressed by the waters of the Sound and the other purred over by the blue waves of the Bay of St. Louis. Here is the beginning of the great three-mile trestle bridge to the town of Bay St. Louis, and to-night from the beach could be seen the lights of the villas glittering across the Bay like myriads of unsleeping eyes.

Here upon a firm stretch of white sand camped the merry-makers. Soon a great fire of driftwood and pine cones tossed its flames defiantly at a radiant moon in the sky, and the fishers were casting their nets in the sea. The more daring of the girls waded bare-legged in the water, holding pine-torches, spearing flounders and peering for soft-shell crabs.

Annette had wandered farther in the shallow water than the rest. Suddenly she stumbled against a stone, the torch dropped and spluttered at her feet. With a little helpless cry she looked at the stretch of unfamiliar beach and water to find herself all alone.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle," said a voice at her elbow; "you are in distress?"

It was her fisherman, and with a scarce conscious sigh of relief, Annette put her hand into the outstretched one at her side.

"I was looking for soft shells," she explained, "and lost the crowd, and now my torch is out."

"Where is the crowd?" There was some amusement in the tone, and Annette glanced up quickly, prepared to be thoroughly indignant at this fisherman who dared make fun at her; but there was such a kindly look about his mouth that she was reassured and said meekly,—

"At Henderson's Point."

"You have wandered a half-mile away," he mused, "and have nothing to show for your pains but very wet skirts. If mademoiselle will permit me, I will take her to her friends, but allow me to suggest that mademoiselle will leave the water and walk on the sands."

"But I am barefoot," wailed Annette, "and I am afraid of the fiddlers."

Fiddler crabs, you know, aren't pleasant things to be dangling around one's bare feet, and they are more numerous than sand fleas down at Henderson's Point.

"True," assented the fisherman; "then we shall have to wade back."

The fishing was over when they rounded the point and came in sight of the cheery bonfire with its Rembrandt-like group, and the air was savoury with the smell of frying fish and crabs. The fisherman was not to be tempted by appeals to stay, but smilingly disappeared down the sands, the red glare of his torch making a glowing track in the water.

"Ah, Mees Annette," whispered Natalie, between mouthfuls of a rich

croaker, "you have found a beau in the water."

"And the fisherman of the Pass, too," laughed her cousin Ida.

Annette tossed her head, for Philip had growled audibly.

"Do you know, Philip," cried Annette a few days after, rudely shaking him from his siesta on the gallery,— "do you know that I have found my fisherman's hut?"

"Hum," was the only response.

"Yes, and it's the quaintest, most delightful spot imaginable. Philip, do come with me and see it."

"Hum."

"Oh, Philip, you are so lazy; do come with me."

"Yes, but, my dear Annette," protested Philip, "this is a warm day, and I am tired."

Still, his curiosity being aroused, he went grumbling. It was not a very long drive, back from the beach across the railroad and through the pine forest to the bank of a dark, slow-flowing bayou. The fisherman's hut was small, two-roomed, whitewashed, pine-boarded, with the traditional mud chimney acting as a sort of support to one of its uneven sides. Within was a weird assortment of curios from every uncivilized part of the globe. Also were there fishing-tackle and guns in reckless profusion. The fisherman, in the kitchen of the mud-chimney, was sardonically waging war with a basket of little bayou crabs.

"Entrez, mademoiselle et monsieur," he said pleasantly, grabbing a vicious

crab by its flippers, and smiling at its wild attempts to bite. "You see I am busy, but make yourself at home."

"Well, how on earth—" began Philip.

"Sh—sh—" whispered Annette. "I was driving out in the woods this morning, and stumbled on the hut. He asked me in, but I came right over after you."

The fisherman, having succeeded in getting the last crab in the kettle of boiling water, came forward smiling and began to explain the curios.

"Then you have not always lived at Pass Christian," said Philip.

"Mais non, monsieur, I am spending a summer here."

"And he spends his winters, doubtless, selling fish in the French market," spitefully soliloquised Philip.

The fisherman was looking unutterable things into Annette's eyes, and, it seemed to Philip, taking an unconscionably long time explaining the use of an East Indian stiletto.

"Oh, wouldn't it be delightful!" came from Annette at last.

"What?" asked Philip.

"Why, Monsieur LeConte says he'll take six of us out in his catboat tomorrow for a fishing-trip on the Gulf."

"Hum," drily.

"And I'll get Natalie and her cousins."

"Yes," still more drily.

Annette chattered on, entirely oblivious of the strainedness of the men's adieux, and still chattered as they drove through the pines.

"I did not know that you were going to take fishermen and marchands into the bosom of your social set when you came here," growled Philip, at last.

"But, Cousin Phil, can't you see he is a gentleman? The fact that he makes no excuses or protestations is a proof."

"You are a fool," was the polite response.

Still, at six o'clock next morning, there was a little crowd of seven upon the pier, laughing and chatting at the little "Virginie" dipping her bows in the water and flapping her sails in the brisk wind. Natalie's pink bonnet blushed in the early sunshine, and Natalie's mamma, comely and portly, did chaperonage duty. It was not long before the sails gave swell into the breeze and the little boat scurried to the Sound. Past the lighthouse on its gawky iron stalls, she flew, and now rounded the white sands of Cat Island.

"Bravo, the Gulf!" sang a voice on the lookout. The little boat dipped, halted an instant, then rushed fast into the blue Gulf waters.

"We will anchor here," said the host, "have luncheon, and fish."

Philip could not exactly understand why the fisherman should sit so close to Annette and whisper so much into her ears. He chafed at her acting the part of hostess, and was possessed of a murderous desire to throw the pink sun-bonnet and its owner into the sea, when Natalie whispered audibly to one of her cousins that "Mees Annette act nice wit' her lovare."

The sun was banking up flaming pillars of rose and gold in the west when the little "Virginie" rounded Cat Island on her way home, and the quick Southern twilight was fast dying into darkness when she was tied up to the pier and the merry-makers sprang off with baskets of fish. Annette had distinguished herself by catching one small shark, and had immediately ceased to fish and devoted her attention to her fisherman and his line. Philip had angled fiercely, landing trout, croakers, sheepshead, snappers in bewildering luck. He had broken each hopeless captive's neck savagely, as though they were personal enemies. He did not look happy as they landed, though paeans of praise were being sung in his honour.

As the days passed on, "the fisherman of the Pass" began to dance attendance on Annette. What had seemed a joke became serious. Aunt Nina, urged by Philip, remonstrated, and even the mamma of the pink sunbonnet began to look grave. It was all very well for a city demoiselle to talk with a fisherman and accept favours at his hands, provided that the city demoiselle understood that a vast and bridgeless gulf stretched between her and the fisherman.

But when the demoiselle forgot the gulf and the fisherman refused to recognise it, why, it was time to take matters in hand.

To all of Aunt Nina's remonstrances, Philip's growlings, and the averted glances of her companions, Annette was deaf. "You are narrow-minded," she said laughingly. "I am interested in Monsieur LeConte simply as a study. He is entertaining; he talks well of his travels, and as for refusing to recognise the difference between us, why, he never dreamed of such a thing."

Suddenly a peremptory summons home from Annette's father put an end to the fears of Philip. Annette pouted, but papa must be obeyed. She blamed Philip and Aunt Nina for telling tales, but Aunt Nina was uncommunicative, and Philip too obviously cheerful to derive much

satisfaction from.

That night she walked with the fisherman hand in hand on the sands. The wind from the pines bore the scarcely recognisable, subtle freshness of early autumn, and the waters had a hint of dying summer in their sob on the beach.

"You will remember," said the fisherman, "that I have told you nothing about myself."

"Yes," murmured Annette.

"And you will keep your promises to me?"

"Yes."

"Let me hear you repeat them again."

"I promise you that I will not forget you. I promise you that I will never speak of you to anyone until I see you again. I promise that I will then clasp your hand wherever you may be."

"And mademoiselle will not be discouraged, but will continue her studies?"

"Yes."

It was all very romantic, by the waves of the Sound, under a harvest moon, that seemed all sympathy for these two, despite the fact that it was probably looking down upon hundreds of other equally romantic couples. Annette went to bed with glowing cheeks, and a heart whose pulsations would have caused a physician to prescribe unlimited digitalis.

It was still hot in New Orleans when she returned home, and it seemed

hard to go immediately to work. But if one is going to be an opera-singer some day and capture the world with one's voice, there is nothing to do but to study, study, sing, practise, even though one's throat be parched, one's head a great ache, and one's heart a nest of discouragement and sadness at what seems the uselessness of it all. Annette had now a new incentive to work; the fisherman had once praised her voice when she hummed a barcarole on the sands, and he had insisted that there was power in its rich notes. Though the fisherman had showed no cause why he should be accepted as a musical critic, Annette had somehow respected his judgment and been accordingly elated.

It was the night of the opening of the opera. There was the usual crush, the glitter and confusing radiance of the brilliant audience. Annette, with papa, Aunt Nina, and Philip, was late reaching her box. The curtain was up, and "La Juive" was pouring forth defiance at her angry persecutors. Annette listened breathlessly. In fancy, she too was ringing her voice out to an applauding house. Her head unconsciously beat time to the music, and one hand half held her cloak from her bare shoulders.

Then Eleazar appeared, and the house rose at the end of his song. Encores it gave, and bravos and cheers. He bowed calmly, swept his eyes over the tiers until they found Annette, where they rested in a half-smile of recognition.

"Philip," gasped Annette, nervously raising her glasses, "my fisherman!"

"Yes, an opera-singer is better than a marchand," drawled Philip.

The curtain fell on the first act. The house was won by the new tenor; it called and recalled him before the curtain. Clearly he had sung his way into the hearts of his audience at once.

"Papa, Aunt Nina," said Annette, "you must come behind the scenes with

me. I want you to meet him. He is delightful. You must come."

Philip was bending ostentatiously over the girl in the next box. Papa and Aunt Nina consented to be dragged behind the scenes. Annette was well known, for, in hopes of some day being an occupant of one of the dressing-rooms, she had made friends with everyone connected with the opera.

Eleazar received them, still wearing his brown garb and patriarchal beard.

"How you deceived me!" she laughed, when the greetings and introductions were over.

"I came to America early," he smiled back at her, "and thought I'd try a little incognito at the Pass. I was not well, you see. It has been of great benefit to me."

"I kept my promise," she said in a lower tone.

"Thank you; that also has helped me."

Annette's teacher began to note a wonderful improvement in his pupil's voice. Never did a girl study so hard or practise so faithfully. It was truly wonderful. Now and then Annette would say to papa as if to reassure herself,—

"And when Monsieur Cherbart says I am ready to go to Paris, I may go, papa?"

And papa would say a "Certainly" that would send her back to the piano with renewed ardour.

As for Monsieur LeConte, he was the idol of New Orleans. Seldom had

there been a tenor who had sung himself so completely into the very hearts of a populace. When he was billed, the opera displayed "Standing Room" signs, no matter what the other attractions in the city might be. Sometimes Monsieur LeConte delighted small audiences in Annette's parlour, when the hostess was in a perfect flutter of happiness. Not often, you know, for the leading tenor was in great demand at the homes of society queens.

"Do you know," said Annette, petulantly, one evening, "I wish for the old days at Pass Christian."

"So do I," he answered tenderly; "will you repeat them with me next summer?"

"If I only could!" she gasped.

Still she might have been happy, had it not been for Madame Dubeau,—Madame Dubeau, the flute-voiced leading soprano, who wore the single dainty curl on her forehead, and thrilled her audiences oftentimes more completely than the fisherman. Madame Dubeau was La Juive to his Eleazar, Leonore to his Manfred, Elsa to his Lohengrin, Aida to his Rhadames, Marguerite to his Faust; in brief, Madame Dubeau was his opposite. She caressed him as Mignon, pleaded with him as Michaela, died for him in "Les Huguenots," broke her heart for love of him in "La Favorite." How could he help but love her, Annette asked herself, how could he? Madame Dubeau was beautiful and gifted and charming.

Once she whispered her fears to him when there was the meagrest bit of an opportunity. He laughed. "You don't understand, little one," he said tenderly; "the relations of professional people to each other are peculiar. After you go to Paris, you will know."

Still, New Orleans had built up its romance, and gossiped accordingly.

"Have you heard the news?" whispered Lola to Annette, leaning from her box at the opera one night. The curtain had just gone up on "Herodias," and for some reason or other, the audience applauded with more warmth than usual. There was a noticeable number of good-humoured, benignant smiles on the faces of the applauders.

"No," answered Annette, breathlessly,— "no, indeed, Lola; I am going to Paris next week. I am so delighted I can't stop to think."

"Yes, that is excellent," said Lola, "but all New Orleans is smiling at the romance. Monsieur LeConte and Madame Dubeau were quietly married last night, but it leaked out this afternoon. See all the applause she's receiving!"

Annette leaned back in her chair, very white and still. Her box was empty after the first act, and a quiet little tired voice that was almost too faint to be heard in the carriage on the way home, said—

"Papa, I don't think I care to go to Paris, after all."

BACK PAY, by Fannie Hurst

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I set out to write a love story, and for the purpose sharpened a bright-pink pencil with a glass ruby frivolously at the eraser end.

Something sweet. Something dainty. A candied rose leaf after all the bitter war lozenges. A miss. A kiss. A golf stick. A motor car. Or, if need be, a bit of khaki, but without one single spot of blood or mud, and nicely pressed as to those fetching peg-top trouser effects where they wing out just below the skirt-coat. The oldest story in the world told newly. No wear out to it. Editors know. It's as staple as eggs or printed lawn or ipecac. The good old-fashioned love story with the above-mentioned miss, kiss, and, if need be for the sake of timeliness, the bit of khaki, pressed.

Just my luck that, with one of these modish tales at the tip of my pink pencil, Hester Bevins should come pounding and clamoring at the door of my mental reservation, quite drowning out the rather high, the lipsy, and, if I do say it myself, distinctly musical patter of Arline. That was to have been her name. Arline Kildane. Sweet, don't you think, and with just a bit of wild Irish rose in it?

But Hester Bevins would not let herself be gainsaid, sobbing a little, elbowing her way through the group of mental unborns, and leaving me to blow my pitch pipe for a minor key.

Not that Hester's isn't one of the oldest stories in the world, too. No matter how newly told, she is as old as sin, and sin is but a few weeks younger than love--and how often the two are interchangeable!

If it be a fact that the true lady is, in theory, either a virgin or

a lawful wife, then Hester Bevins stands immediately convicted on two charges.

She was neither. The most that can be said for her is that she was honestly what she was.

"If the wages of sin is death," she said to a roadhouse party of roysterers one dawn, "then I've quite a bit of back pay coming to me." And joined in the shout that rose off the table.

I can sketch her in for you rather simply because of the hackneyed lines of her very, very old story. Whose pasts so quickly mold and disintegrate as those of women of Hester's stripe? Their yesterdays are entirely soluble in the easy waters of their to-days.

For the first seventeen years of her life she lived in what we might call Any American Town of, say, fifteen or twenty thousand inhabitants. Her particular one was in Ohio. Demopolis, I think. One of those change-engine-and-take-on-water stops with a stucco art-nouveau station, a roof drooping all round it, as if it needed to be shaved off like edges of a pie, and the name of the town writ in conch shells on a green slant of terrace. You know--the kind that first establishes a ten-o'clock curfew for its young, its dance halls and motion-picture theaters, and then sends in a hurry call for a social-service expert from one of the large Eastern cities to come and diagnose its malignant vice undergrowth.

Hester Bevins, of a mother who died bearing her and one of those disappearing fathers who can speed away after the accident without even stopping to pick up the child or leave a license number, was reared--no, grew up, is better--in the home of an aunt. A blond aunt with many gold teeth and many pink and blue wrappers.

Whatever Hester knew of the kind of home that fostered her, it left apparently no welt across her sensibilities. It was a rather poor house, an unpainted frame in a poor street, but there was never a lack of gayety or, for that matter, any pinching lack of funds. It was an actual fact that, at thirteen, cotton or lisle stockings brought out a little irritated rash on Hester's slim young legs, and she wore silk. Abominations, it is true, at three pair for a dollar, that sprang runs and would not hold a darn, but, just the same, they were silk. There was an air of easy _camaraderie_ and easy money about that house. It was not unusual for her to come home from school at high noon and find a front-room group of one, two, three, or four guests, almost invariably men. Frequently these guests handed her out as much as half a dollar for candy money, and not another child in school reckoned in more than pennies.

Once a guest, for reasons of odd change, I suppose, handed her out thirteen cents. Outraged, at the meanness of the sum, and with an early and deep-dyed superstition of thirteen, she dashed the coins out of his hand and to the four corners of the room, escaping in the guffaw of laughter that went up.

Often her childish sleep in a small top room with slanting sides would be broken upon by loud ribaldry that lasted into dawn, but never by word, and certainly not by deed, was she to know from her aunt any of its sordid significance.

Literally, Hester Bevins was left to feather her own nest. There were no demands made upon her. Once, in the little atrocious front parlor of horsehair and chromo, one of the guests, the town baggage-master, to be exact, made to embrace her, receiving from the left rear a sounding smack across cheek and ear from the aunt.

"Cut that! Hester, go out and play! Whatever she's got to learn from

life, she can't say she learned it in my house."

There were even two years of high school, and at sixteen, when she went, at her own volition, to clerk in Finley's two-story department store on High Street, she was still innocent, although she and Gerald Fishback were openly sweethearts.

Gerald was a Thor. Of course, you are not to take that literally; but if ever there was a carnification of the great god himself, then Gerald was in his image. A wide streak of the Scandinavian ran through his make-up, although he had been born in Middletown, and from there had come recently to the Finley Dry Goods Company as an accountant.

He was so the viking in his bigness that once, on a picnic, he had carried two girls, screaming their fun, across twenty feet of stream. Hester was one of them.

It was at this picnic, the Finley annual, that he asked Hester, then seventeen, to marry him. She was darkly, wildly pretty, as a Rambler rose tugging at its stem is restlessly pretty, as a pointed little gazelle smelling up at the moon is whimsically pretty, as a runaway stream from off the flank of a river is naughtily pretty, and she wore a crisp percale shirt waist with a saucy bow at the collar, fifty-cent silk stockings, and already she had almond incarnadine nails with points to them.

They were in the very heart of Wallach's Grove, under a natural cathedral of trees, the noises of the revelers and the small explosions of soda-water and beer bottles almost remote enough for perfect quiet. He was stretched his full and splendid length at the picknickers' immemorial business of plucking and sucking grass blades, and she seated very trimly, her little blue-serge skirt crawling up ever so slightly to

reveal the silken ankle, on a rock beside him.

"Tickle-tickle!" she cried, with some of that irrepressible animal spirit of hers, and leaning to brush his ear with a twig.

He caught at her hand.

"Hester," he said, "marry me."

She felt a foaming through her until her finger tips sang.

"Well, I like that!" was what she said, though, and flung up a pointed profile that was like that same gazelle's smelling the moon.

He was very darkly red, and rose to his knees to clasp her about the waist. She felt like relaxing back against his blondness and feeling her fingers plow through the great double wave of his hair. But she did not.

"You're too poor," she said.

He sat back without speaking for a long minute.

"Money isn't everything," he said, finally, and with something gone from his voice.

"I know," she said, looking off; "but it's a great deal if you happen to want it more than anything else in the world."

"Then, if that's how you feel about it, Hester, next to wanting you, I want it, too, more than anything else in the world."

"There's no future in bookkeeping."

"I know a fellow in Cincinnati who's a hundred-and-fifty-dollar man. Hester? Dear?"

"A week?"

"Why, of course not, dear--a month!"

"Faugh!" she said, still looking off.

He felt out for her hand, at the touch of her reddening up again.

"Hester," he said, "you're the most beautiful, the most exciting, the most maddening, the most--the most everything girl in the world! You're not going to have an easy time of it, Hester, with your--your environment and your dangerousness, if you don't settle down--quick, with some strong fellow to take care of you. A fellow who loves you. That's me, Hester. I want to make a little home for you and protect you. I can't promise you the money--right off, but I can promise you the bigger something from the very start, Hester. Dear?"

She would not let her hand relax to his.

"I hate this town," she said.

"There's Cincinnati. Maybe my friend could find an opening there."

"Faugh!"

"Cincinnati, dear, is a metropolis."

"No, no! You don't understand. I hate littleness. Even little metropolises. Cheapness. I hate little towns and little spenders and mercerized stockings and cotton lisle next to my skin, and

machine-stitched nightgowns. Ugh! it scratches!"

"And I--I just love you in those starchy white shirt waists, Hester. You're beautiful."

"That's just the trouble. It satisfies you, but it suffocates me. I've got a pink-crêpe-de-Chine soul. Pink crêpe de Chine--you hear?"

He sat back on his heels.

"It--Is it true, then, Hester that--that you're making up with that salesman from New York?"

"Why," she said, coloring--"why, I've only met him twice walking up High Street, evenings!"

"But it is true, isn't it, Hester?"

"Say, who was answering your questions this time last year?"

"But it is true, isn't it, Hester? Isn't it?"

"Well, of all the nerve!"

But it was.

* * * * *

The rest tells glibly. The salesman, who wore blue-and-white-striped soft collars with a bar pin across the front, does not even enter the story. He was only a stepping-stone. From him the ascent or descent, or whatever you choose to call it, was quick and sheer.

Five years later Hester was the very private, the very exotic, manicured, coiffured, scented, svelt, and strictly _de-luxe_ chattel of one Charles G. Wheeler, of New York City and Rosencranz, Long Island, vice-president of the Standard Tractor Company, a member of no clubs but of the Rosencranz church, three lodges, and several corporations.

You see, there is no obvious detail lacking. Yes, there was an apartment. "Flat" it becomes under their kind of tenancy, situated on the windiest bend of Riverside Drive and minutely true to type from the pale-blue and brocade vernis-Martin parlor of talking-machine, mechanical piano, and cellarette built to simulate a music cabinet, to the pink-brocaded bedroom with a _chaise-longue_ piled high with a small mountain of lace pillowettes that were liberally interlarded with paper-bound novels, and a spacious, white-marble adjoining bathroom with a sunken tub, rubber-sheeted shower, white-enamel weighing scales, and overloaded medicine chest of cosmetic array in frosted bottles, sleeping-, headache-, sedative powders, _et al_. There were also a negro maid, two Pomeranian dogs, and last, but by no means least, a private telephone inclosed in a hall closet and lighted by an electric bulb that turned on automatically to the opening of the door.

There was nothing sinister about Wheeler. He was a rather fair exponent of that amazing genus known as "typical New-Yorker," a roll of money in his pocket, and a roll of fat at the back of his neck. He went in for light checked suits, wore a platinum-and-Oriental-pearl chain across his waistcoat, and slept at a Turkish bath once a week; was once named in a large corporation scandal, escaping indictment only after violent and expensive skirmishes; could be either savage or familiar with waiters; wore highly manicured nails, which he regarded frequently in public, white-silk socks only; and maintained, on a twenty-thousand-a-year scale in the decorous suburb of Rosencranz, a decorous wife and three

children, and, like all men of his code, his ethics were strictly double decked. He would not permit his nineteen-year-old daughter Marion so much as a shopping tour to the city without the chaperonage of her mother or a friend, forbade in his wife, a comely enough woman with a white unmarcelled coiffure and upper arms a bit baggy with withering flesh, even the slightest of shirtwaist V's unless filled in with net, and kept up, at an expense of no less than fifteen thousand a year--thirty the war year that tractors jumped into the war-industry class--the very high-priced, -tempered, -handed, and -stepping Hester of wild-gazelle charm.

Not that Hester stepped much. There were a long underslung roadster and a great tan limousine with yellow-silk curtains at the call of her private telephone.

The Wheeler family used, not without complaint, a large open car of very early vintage, which in winter was shut in with flapping curtains with isinglass peepers, and leaked cold air badly.

On more than one occasion they passed on the road--these cars. The long tan limousine with the shock absorbers, foot warmers, two brown Pomeranian dogs, little case of enamel-top bottles, fresh flowers, and outside this little jewel-case interior, smartly exposed, so that the blast hit him from all sides, a chauffeur in uniform that harmonized nicely with the tans and yellows. And then the grotesque caravan of the Azoic motor age, with its flapping curtains and ununiformed youth in visored cap at the wheel.

There is undoubtedly an unsavory aspect to this story. For purpose of fiction, it is neither fragrant nor easily digested. But it is not so unsavory as the social scheme which made it possible for those two cars to pass thus on the road, and, at the same time, Charles G. Wheeler to remain the unchallenged member of the three lodges, the corporations,

and the Rosencranz church, with a memorial window in his name on the left side as you enter, and again his name spelled out on a brass plate at the end of a front pew.

No one but God and Mrs. Wheeler knew what was in her heart. It is possible that she did not know what the world knew, but hardly. That she endured it is not admirable, but then there were the three children, and, besides, she lived in a world that let it go at that. And so she continued to hold up her head in her rather poor, mute way, rode beside her husband to funerals, weddings, and to the college Commencement of their son at Yale. Scrimped a little, cried a little, prayed a little in private, but outwardly lived the life of the smug in body and soul.

But the Wheelers' is another story, also a running social sore; but it was Hester, you remember, who came sobbing and clamoring to be told.

As Wheeler once said of her, she was a darn fine clothes horse. There was no pushed-up line of flesh across the middle of her back, as the corsets did it to Mrs. Wheeler. She was honed to the ounce. The white-enameled weighing scales, the sweet oils, the flexible fingers of her masseur, the dumb-bells, the cabinet, salt-water, needle-spray, and vapor baths saw to that. Her skin, unlike Marion Wheeler's, was unfreckled, and as heavily and tropically white as a magnolia leaf, and, of course, she reddened her lips, and the moonlike pallor came out more than ever.

As I said, she was frankly what she was. No man looked at her more than once without knowing it. To use an awkward metaphor, it was before her face like an overtone; it was an invisible caul. The wells of her eyes were muddy with it.

But withal, she commanded something of a manner, even from Wheeler. He

had no key to the apartment. He never entered her room without knocking. There were certain of his friends she would not tolerate, from one or another aversion, to be party to their not infrequent carousals. Men did not always rise from their chairs when she entered a room, but she suffered few liberties from them. She was absolutely indomitable in her demands.

"Lord!" ventured Wheeler, upon occasion, across a Sunday-noon, lace-spread breakfast table, when she was slim and cool fingered in orchid-colored draperies, and his newest gift of a six-carat, pear-shaped diamond blazing away on her right hand. "Say, aren't these Yvette bills pretty steep?

"One midnight-blue-and-silver gown	\$485.00
One blue-and-silver head bandeau	50.00
One serge-and-satin trotteur gown	275.00
One ciel-blue tea gown	280.00

"Is that the cheapest you can drink tea? Whew!"

She put down her coffee cup, which she usually held with one little finger poised elegantly outward as if for flight.

"You've got a nerve!" she said, rising and pushing back her chair. "Over whose ticker are you getting quotations that I come cheap?"

He was immediately conciliatory, rising also to enfold her in an embrace that easily held her slightness.

"Go on," he said. "You could work me for the Woolworth Building in diamonds if you wanted it badly enough."

"Funny way of showing it! I may be a lot of things, Wheeler, but I'm not

cheap. You're darn lucky that the war is on and I'm not asking for a French car."

He crushed his lips to hers.

"You devil!" he said.

There were frequent parties. Dancing at Broadway cabarets, all-night joy rides, punctuated with road-house stop-overs, and not infrequently, in groups of three or four couples, ten-day pilgrimages to showy American spas.

"Getting boiled out," they called it. It was part of Hester's scheme for keeping her sveltness.

Her friendships were necessarily rather confined to a definite circle--within her own apartment house, in fact. On the floor above, also in large, bright rooms of high rental, and so that they were exchanging visits frequently during the day, often *_en déshabillé_*, using the stairway that wound up round the elevator shaft, lived a certain Mrs. Kitty Drew, I believe she called herself. She was plump and blond, and so very scented that her aroma lay on a hallway for an hour after she had scurried through it. She was well known and chiefly distinguished by a large court-plaster crescent which she wore on her left shoulder blade. She enjoyed the bounty of a Wall Street broker who for one day had attained the conspicuousness of cornering the egg market.

There were two or three others within this group. A Mrs. Denison, half French, and a younger girl called Babe. But Mrs. Drew and Hester were intimates. They dwaddled daily in one or the other's apartment, usually lazy and lacy with negligée, lounging about on the mounds of lingerie pillows over chocolates, cigarettes, novels, Pomeranians, and always the

headache powders, nerve sedatives, or smelling salts, a running line of: "Lord! I've a head!" "I need a good cry for the blues!" "Talk about a dark-brown taste!" or, "There was some kick to those cocktails last night," through their conversation.

KITTY: "Br-r-r! I'm as nervous as a cat to-day."

HESTER: "Naughty, naughty bad doggie to bite muvver's diamond ring."

KITTY: "Leave it to you to land a pear-shaped diamond on your hooks."

HESTER: "He fell for it, just like that!"

KITTY: "You could milk a billiard ball."

HESTER: "I don't see any 'quality of mercy' to spare around your flat."

There were the two years of high school, you see.

"Ed's going out to Geyser Springs next month for the cure. I told him he could not go without me unless over my dead body, he could not."

"Geyser Springs. That's thirty miles from my home town."

"Your home town? Nighty-night! I thought you was born on the corner of Forty-second Street and Broadway with a lobster claw in your mouth."

"Demopolis, Ohio."

"What is that--a skin disease?"

"My last relation in the world died out there two years ago. An aunt. Wouldn't mind some Geyser Springs myself if I could get some of this

stiffness out of my joints."

"Come on! I dare you! May Denison and Chris will come in on it, and Babe can always find somebody. Make it three or four cars full and let's motor out. We all need a good boiling, anyways. Wheeler looks about ready for spontaneous combustion, and I got a twinge in my left little toe. You on?"

"I am, if he is."

"If he is!" He'd fall for life in an Igorrote village with a ring in his nose if you wanted it."

And truly enough, it did come about that on a height-of-the-season evening a highly cosmopolitan party of four couples trooped into the solid-marble foyer of the Geyser Springs Hotel, motor coated, goggled, veiled; a whole litter of pigskin and patent-leather bags, hampers, and hat boxes, two golf bags, two Pomeranians, a bull in spiked collar, furs, leather coats, monogrammed rugs, thermos bottles, air pillows, robes, and an _ensemble_ of fourteen wardrobe trunks sent by express.

They took the "cure." Rode horseback, motored, played roulette at the casino for big stakes, and scorned the American plan of service for the smarter European idea, with a special _à la carte_ menu for each meal. Extraordinary-looking mixed drinks, strictly against the mandates of the "cure," appeared at their table. Strange midnight goings-on were reported by the more conservative hotel guests, and the privacy of their circle was allowed full integrity by the little veranda groups of gouty ladies or middle-aged husbands with liver spots on their faces. The bath attendants reveled in the largest tips of the season. When Hester walked down the large dining room evenings, she was a signal for the craning of necks for the newest shock of her newest extreme toilette. The kinds of toilettes that shocked the women into envy and mental notes of how the

underarm was cut, and the men into covert delight. Wheeler liked to sit back and put her through her paces like a high-strung filly.

"Make 'em sit up, girl! You got them all looking like dimes around here."

One night she descended to the dining room in a black evening gown so daringly lacking in back, and yet, withal, so slimly perfect an elegant thing, that an actual breathlessness hung over the hall, the clatter of dishes pausing.

There was a gold bird of paradise dipped down her hair over one shoulder, trailing its smoothness like fingers of lace. She defied with it as she walked.

"Take it from me," said Kitty, who felt fat in lavender that night, "she's going it one too strong."

Another evening she descended, always last, in a cloth of silver with a tiny, an absurd, an impeccably tight silver turban dipped down over one eye, and absolutely devoid of jewels except the pear-shaped diamond on her left forefinger.

They were a noisy, a spending, a cosmopolitan crowd of too-well-fed men and too-well-groomed women, ignored by the veranda groups of wives and mothers, openly dazzling and arousing a tremendous curiosity in the younger set, and quite obviously sought after by their own kind.

But Hester's world, too, is all run through with sharply defined social schisms.

"I wish that Irwin woman wouldn't always hang round our crowd," she said, one morning, as she and Kitty lay side by side in the cooling room

after their baths, massages, manicures, and shampoos. "I don't want to be seen running with her."

"Did you see the square emerald she wore last night?"

"Fake. I know the clerk at the Synthetic Jewelry Company had it made up for her. She's cheap, I tell you. Promiscuous. Who ever heard of anybody standing back of her? She knocks around. She sells her old clothes to Tessie, my manicurist. I've got a line on her. She's cheap."

Kitty, who lay with her face under a white mud of cold cream and her little mouth merely a hole, turned on her elbow.

"We can't all be top-notchers, Hester," she said. "You're hard as nails."

"I guess I am, but you've got to be to play this game. The ones who aren't end up by stuffing the keyhole and turning on the gas. You've got to play it hard or not at all. If you've got the name, you might as well have the game."

"If I had it to do over again--well, there would be one more wife-and-mother role being played in this little old world, even if I had to play it on a South Dakota farm."

"'Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well,' I used to write in a copy book. Well, that's the way I feel about this. To me, anything is worth doing to escape the cotton stockings and lisle next to your skin. I admit I never sit down and _think_. You know, sit down and take stock of myself. What's the use thinking? Live! Yes," mused Hester, her arms in a wreath over her head, "I think I'd do it all over again. There's not been so many, at that. Three. The first was a salesman. He'd have married me, but I couldn't see it on six thousand a year. Nice fellow,

too--an easy spender in a small way, but I couldn't see a future to ladies' neckwear. I hear he made good later in munitions. Al was a pretty good sort, too, but tight. How I hate tightness! I've been pretty lucky in the long run, I guess."

"Did I say 'hard as nails'?" said Kitty, grotesquely fitting a cigarette in the aperture of her mouth. "I apologize. Why, alongside of you a piece of flint is morning cereal. Haven't you ever had a love affair? I've been married twice--that's how chicken hearted I can be. Haven't you ever pumped a little faster just because a certain some one walked into the room?"

"Once."

"Once what?"

"I liked a fellow. Pretty much. A blond. Say, he was blond! I always think to myself, Kit, next to Gerald, you've got the bluest eyes under heaven. Only, his didn't have any dregs."

"Thanks, dearie."

"I sometimes wonder about Gerald. I ought to drive over while we're out here. Poor old Gerald Fishback!"

"Sweet name--'Fishback.' No wonder you went wrong, dearie."

"Oh, I'm not getting soft. I saw my bed and made it, nice and soft and comfy, and I'm lying on it without a whimper."

"You just bet your life you made it up nice and comfy! You've the right idea; I have to hand that to you. You command respect from them. Lord! Ed would as soon fire a teacup at me as not. But, with me, it pays. The

last one he broke he made up to me with my opal-and-diamond beetle."

"Wouldn't wear an opal if it was set next to the Hope diamond."

"Superstitious, dearie?"

"Unlucky. Never knew it to fail."

"Not a superstition in my bones. I don't believe in walking under ladders or opening an umbrella in the house or sitting down with thirteen, but, Lordy! never saw the like with you! Thought you'd have the hysterics over that little old vanity mirror you broke that day out at the races."

"Br-r-r! I hated it."

"Lay easy, dearie. Nothing can touch you the way he's raking in the war contracts."

"Great--isn't it?"

"Play for a country home, dearie. I always say real estate and jewelry are something in the hand. Look ahead in this game, I always say."

"You just bet I've looked ahead."

"So have I, but not enough."

"Somehow, I never feel afraid. I could get a job to-morrow if I had to."

"Say, dearie, if it comes to that, with twenty pounds off me, there's not a chorus I couldn't land back in."

"I worked once, you know, in Lichtig's import shop."

"Fifth Avenue?"

"Yes. It was in between the salesman and Al. I sold two thousand five hundred dollars' worth of gowns the first week."

"Sure enough?"

"Girl,' old man Lichtig said to me the day I quit--'girl,' he said, 'if ever you need this job again, comeback; it's waiting.'"

"Fine chance!"

"I've got the last twenty-five dollars I earned pinned away this minute in the pocket of the little dark-blue suit I wore to work. I paid for that suit with my first month's savings. A little dark-blue Norfolk, Lichtig let me have out of stock for twenty-seven fifty."

"Were they giving them away with a pound of tea?"

"Honest, Kitty, it was neat. Little white shirt waist, tan shoes, and one of those slick little five-dollar sailors, and every cent paid out of my salary. I could step into that outfit to-morrow, look the part, and land back that job or any other. I had a way with the trade, even back at Finley's."

"Here, hold my jewel bag, honey; I'm going to die of cold-cream suffocation if she don't soon come back and unsmeared me."

"Opal beetle in it?"

"Yes, dearie; but it won't bite. It's muzzled with my diamond

horseshoe."

"Nothing doing, Kit. Put it under your pillow."

"You better watch out. There's a thirteenth letter in the alphabet; you might accidentally use it some day. You're going to have a sweet time to-night, you are!"

"Why?"

"The boys have engaged De Butera to come up to the rooms."

"You mean the fortune teller over at the Stag Hotel?"

"She's not a fortune teller, you poor nervous wreck. She's the highest-priced spiritualist in the world. Moving tables--spooks--woof!"

"Faugh!" said Hester, rising from her couch and feeling with her little bare feet for the daintiest of pink-silk mules. "I could make tables move, too, at forty dollars an hour. Where's my attendant? I want an alcohol rub."

They did hold séance that night in a fine spirit of lark, huddled together in the de-luxe sitting room of one of their suites, and little half-hysterical shrieks and much promiscuous ribaldry under cover of darkness.

Madame de Butera was of a distinctly fat and earthy blondness, with a coarse-lace waist over pink, and short hands covered with turquoise rings of many shapes and blues.

Tables moved. A dead sister of Wheeler's spoke in thin, high voice. Why is it the dead are always so vocally thin and high?

A chair tilted itself on hind legs, eliciting squeals from the women. Babe spoke with a gentleman friend long since passed on, and Kitty with a deceased husband, and began to cry quite sobbily and took little sips of highball quite gulpily. May Denison, who was openly defiant, allowed herself to be hypnotized and lay rigid between two chairs, and Kitty went off into rampant hysteria until Wheeler finally placed a hundred-dollar bill over the closed eyes, and whether under it, or to the legerdmain of madam's manipulating hands, the tight eyes opened, May, amid riots of laughter, claiming for herself the hundred-dollar bill, and Kitty, quite resuscitated, jumping up for a table cancan, her yellow hair tumbling, and her china-blue eyes with the dregs in them inclined to water.

All but Hester. She sat off by herself in a peacock-colored gown that wrapped her body suavely as if the fabric were soaking wet, a band of smoky-blue about her forehead. Never intoxicated, a slight amount of alcohol had a tendency to make her morose.

"What's the matter, Cleo?" asked Wheeler, sitting down beside her and lifting her cool fingers one by one, and, by reason of some remote analogy that must have stirred within him, seeing in her a Nile queen. "What's the matter Cleo? Does the spook stuff get your goat?"

She turned on him eyes that were all troubled up, like waters suddenly wind-blown.

"God!" she said, her fingers, nails inward, closing about his arm. "Wheeler--can--can the--dead--speak?"

But fleeting as the hours themselves were the moods of them all, and the following morning there they were, the eight of them, light with laughter and caparisoned again as to hampers, veils, coats, dogs, off

for a day's motoring through the springtime countryside.

"Where to?" shouted Wheeler, twisting from where he and Hester sat in the first of the cars to call to the two motor-loads behind.

"I thought Crystal Cave was the spot"--from May Denison in the last of the cars, winding her head in a scarlet veil.

"Crystal Cave it is, then."

"Is that through Demopolis?"

Followed a scanning of maps.

"Sure! Here it is! See! Granite City. Mitchell. Demopolis. Crystal Cave."

"Good Lord! Hester, you're not going to spend any time in that dump?"

"It's my home town," she replied, coldly. "The only relation I had is buried there. It's nothing out of your way to drop me on the court-house steps and pick me up as you drive back, I've been wanting to get there ever since we're down here. Wanting to stop by your home town you haven't seen in five years isn't unreasonable, is it?"

He admitted it wasn't, leaning to kiss her.

She turned to him a face soft, with one of the pouts he usually found irresistible.

"Honey," she said, "what do you think?"

"What?"

"Chris is buying May that chinchilla coat I showed you in Meyerbloom's window the day before we left."

"The deuce he is!" he said, letting go of her hand, but hers immediately covering his.

"She's wiring her sister in the 'Girlie Revue' to go in and buy it for her."

"Outrage--fifteen thousand dollars to cover a woman's back! Look at the beautiful scenery, honey! You're always prating about views. Look at those hills over there! Great--isn't it?"

"I wouldn't expect it, Wheeler, if it wasn't war year and you landing one big contract after another. I'd hate to see May show herself in that chinchilla coat when we could beat her to it by a wire. I could telegraph Meyerbloom himself. I bought the sable rug of him. I'd hate it, Wheeler, to see her and Chris beat us to it. So would you. What's fifteen thousand when one of your contracts alone runs into the hundred thousands? Honey?"

"Wire," he said, sourly, but not withdrawing his hand from hers.

* * * * *

They left her at the shady court-house steps in Demopolis, but with pleasantries and gibe.

"Give my love to the town pump."

"Rush the old oaken growler for me."

"So long!" she called, eager to be rid of them. "Pick me up at six sharp."

She walked slowly up High Street. Passers-by turned to stare, but otherwise she was unrecognized. There was a new five-and-ten-cent store, and Finley Brothers had added an ell. High Street was paved. She made a foray down into the little side street where she had spent those queerly remote first seventeen years of her life. How dim her aunt seemed! The little unpainted frame house was gone. There was a lumber yard on the site. Everything seemed to have shrunk. The street was narrower and dirtier than she recalled it.

She made one stop, at the house of Maggie Simms, a high-school chum. It was a frame house, too, and she remembered that the front door opened directly into the parlor and the side entrance was popularly used instead. But a strange sister-in-law opened the side door. Maggie was married and living in Cincinnati. Oh, fine--a master mechanic, and there were twins. She started back toward Finley's, thinking of Gerald, and halfway she changed her mind.

Maggie Simms married and living in Cincinnati. Twins! Heigh-ho! What a world! The visit was hardly a success. At half after five she was on her way back to the court-house steps. Stupid to have made it six!

And then, of course, and quite as you would have it, Gerald Fishback came along. She recognized his blondness long before he saw her. He was bigger and more tanned, and, as of old, carried his hat in his hand. She noticed that there were no creases down the front of his trousers, but the tweed was good and he gave off that intangible aroma of well-being.

She was surprised at the old thrill racing over her. Seeing him was like

a stab of quick steel through the very pit of her being. She reached out, touching him, before he saw her.

"Gerald," she said, soft and teasingly.

It was actually as if he had been waiting for that touch, because before he could possibly have perceived her her name was on his lips.

"Hester!" he said, the blueness of his eyes flashing between blinks.
"Not Hester?"

"Yes, Hester," she said, smiling up at him.

He grasped both her hands, stammering for words that wanted to come quicker than he could articulate.

"Hester!" he kept repeating. "Hester!"

"To think you knew me, Gerald!"

"Know you! I'd know you blindfolded. And how--I--You're beautiful, Hester! I think you've grown five years younger."

"You've got on, Gerald. You look it."

"Yes; I'm general manager now at Finley's."

"I'm so glad. Married?"

"Not while there's a Hester Bevins on earth."

She started at her own name.

"How do you know I'm not married?"

"I--I know--" he said, reddening up.

"Isn't there some place we can talk, Gerald? I've thirty minutes before my friends call for me."

"Thirty minutes?"

"Your rooms? Haven't you rooms or a room where we could go and sit down?"

"Why--why, no, Hester," he said, still red. "I'd rather you didn't go there. But here. Let's stop in at the St. James Hotel. There's a parlor."

To her surprise, she felt herself color up and was pleasantly conscious of her finger tips.

"You darling!" She smiled up at him.

They were seated presently in the unadorned plush-and-cherry, Nottingham-and-Axminster parlor of a small-town hotel.

"Hester," he said, "you're like a vision come to earth."

"I'm a bad girl," she said, challenging his eyes for what he knew.

"You're a little saint walked down and leaving an empty pedestal in my dreams."

She placed her forefinger over his mouth.

"Sh-h!" she said. "I'm not a saint, Gerald; you know that."

"Yes," he said, with a great deal of boyishness in his defiance, "I do know it, Hester, but it is those who have been through the fire who can sometimes come out--new. It was your early environment."

"My aunt died on the town, Gerald, I heard. I could have saved her all that if I had only known. She was cheap, aunt was. Poor soul! She never looked ahead."

"It was your early environment, Hester. I've explained that often enough to them here. I'd bank on you, Hester--swear by you."

She patted him.

"I'm a pretty bad egg, Gerald. According to the standards of a town like this, I'm rotten, and they're about right. For five years, Gerald, I've--"

"The real you is ahead of--and not behind you, Hester."

"How wonderful," she said, "for you to feel that way, but--"

"Hester," he said, more and more the big boy, and his big blond head nearing hers, "I don't care about anything that's past; I only know that, for me, you are the--"

"Gerald," she said, "for God's sake!"

"I'm a two hundred-a-month man now, Hester. I want to build you the prettiest, the whitest little house in this town. Out in the Briarwood section. I'll make them kowtow to you, Hester; I--"

"Why," she said, slowly, and looking at him with a certain sadness, "you couldn't keep me in stockings, Gerald! The aigrettes on this hat cost more than one month of your salary."

"Good God!" he said.

"You're a dear, sweet boy just the same; but you remember what I told you about my *crêpe-de-Chine* soul."

"Just the same, I love you best in those crispy white shirt waists you used to wear and the little blue suits and sailor hats. You remember that day at Finleys' picnic, Hester, that day, dear, that you--you--"

"You dear boy!"

"But it--your mistake--it--it's all over. You work now, don't you, Hester?"

Somehow, looking into the blueness of his eyes and their entreaty for her affirmative, she did what you or I might have done. She half lied, regretting it while the words still smoked on her lips.

"Why, yes, Gerald; I've held a fine position in Lichtig Brothers, New York importers. Those places sometimes pay as high as seventy-five a week. But I don't make any bones, Gerald; I've not been an angel."

"The--the salesman, Hester?"--his lips quivering with a nausea for the question.

"I haven't seen him in four years," she answered, truthfully.

He laid his cheek on her hand.

"I knew you'd come through. It was your environment. I'll marry you to-morrow--to-day, Hester. I love you."

"You darling boy!" she said, her lips back tight against her teeth. "You darling, darling boy!"

"Please, Hester! We'll forget what has been."

"Let me go," she said, rising and pinning on her hat; "let me go--or--or I'll cry, and--and I don't want to cry."

"Hester," he called, rushing after her and wanting to fold her back into his arms, "let me prove my trust--my love--"

"Don't! Let me go! Let me go!"

At slightly after six the ultra cavalcade drew up at the court-house steps. She was greeted with the pleasantries and the gibes.

"Have a good time, sweetness?" asked Wheeler, arranging her rugs.

"Yes," she said, lying back and letting her lids droop; "but tired--very, very tired."

At the hotel, she stopped a moment to write a telegram before going up for the vapor bath, nap, and massage that were to precede dinner.

"Meyerbloom & Co., Furriers. Fifth Avenue, New York," it was addressed.

* * * * *

This is not a war story except that it has to do with profiteering, parlor patriots, and the return of Gerald Fishback.

While Hester was living this tale, and the chinchilla coat was enveloping her like an ineffably tender caress, three hundred thousand of her country's youths were at strangle hold across three thousand miles of sea, and on a notorious night when Hester walked, fully dressed in a green gown of iridescent fish scales, into the electric fountain of a seaside cabaret, and Wheeler had to carry her to her car wrapped in a sable rug, Gerald Fishback was lying with his face in Flanders mud, and his eye sockets blackly deep and full of shrapnel, and a lung-eating gas cloud rolling at him across the vast bombarded dawn.

* * * * *

Hester read of him one morning, sitting up in bed against a mound of lace-over-pink pillows, a masseuse at the pink soles of her feet. It was as if his name catapulted at her from a column she never troubled to read. She remained quite still, looking at the name for a full five minutes after it had pierced her full consciousness. Then, suddenly, she swung out of bed, tilting over the masseuse.

"Tessie," she said, evenly enough, "that will do. I have to hurry to Long Island to a base hospital. Go to that little telephone in the hall--will you?--and call my car."

But the visit was not so easy of execution. It required two days of red tape and official dispensation before she finally reached the seaside hospital that, by unpleasant coincidence, only a year before had been the resort hotel of more than one dancing orgy.

She thought she would faint when she saw him, jerking herself back with a straining of all her faculties. The blood seemed to drain away from her body, leaving her ready to sink, and only the watchful and threatening eye of a man nurse sustained her. He was sitting up in bed,

and she would never have recognized in him anything of Gerald except for the shining Scandinavian quality of his hair. His eyes were not bandaged, but their sockets were dry and bare like the beds of old lakes long since drained. She had only seen the like in eyeless marble busts. There were unsuspected cheek bones, pitched now very high in his face, and his neck, rising above the army nightshirt, seemed cruelly long, possibly from thinness.

"Are you Hester?" whispered the man nurse.

She nodded, her tonsils squeezed together in an absolute knot.

"He called for you all through his delirium," he said, and went out. She stood at the bedside, trying to keep down the screams from her speech when it should come. But he was too quick for her.

"Hester," he said, feeling out.

And in their embrace, her agony melted to tears that choked and seared, beat and scalded her, and all the time it was he who held her with rigid arm, whispered to her, soothed down the sobs which tore through her like the rip of silk, seeming to split her being.

"Now--now! Why, Hester! Now--now--now! Sh-h! It will be over in a minute. You mustn't feel badly. Come now, is this the way to greet a fellow that's so darn glad to see you that nothing matters? Why I can see you, Hester. Plain as day in your little crispy waist. Now, now! You'll get used to it in a minute. Now--now--"

"I can't stand it, Gerald! I can't! Can't! Kill me, Gerald, but don't ask me to stand it!"

He stroked down the side of her, lingering at her cheek.

"Sh-h! Take your time, dear," he said, with the first furry note in his voice. "I know it's hard, but take your time. You'll get used to me. It's the shock, that's all. Sh-h!"

She covered his neck with kisses and scalding tears, her compassion for him racing through her in chills.

"I could tear out my eyes, Gerald, and give them to you. I could tear out my heart and give it to you. I'm bursting of pain. Gerald! Gerald!"

There was no sense of proportion left her. She could think only of what her own physical suffering might do in penance. She would willingly have opened the arteries of her heart and bled for him on the moment. Her compassion wanted to scream. She, who had never sacrificed anything, wanted suddenly to bleed at his feet, and prayed to do so on the agonized crest of the moment.

"There's a girl! Why, I'm going to get well, Hester, and do what thousands of others of the blinded are doing. Build up a new, a useful, and a busy life."

"It's not fair! It's not fair!"

"I'm ready now, except for this old left lung. It's burnt a bit, you see--gas."

"God! God!"

"It's pretty bad, I admit. But there's another way of looking at it. There's a glory in being chosen to bear your country's wounds."

"Your beautiful eyes! Your blue, beautiful eyes! O God, what does it

all mean? Living! Dying! All the rotters, all the rat-eyed ones I know, scot-free and Gerald chosen. God! God! where are you?"

"He was never so close to me as now, Hester. And with you here, dear, He is closer than ever."

"I'll never leave you, Gerald," she said, crying down into his sleeve again. "Don't be afraid of the dark, dear; I'll never leave you."

"Nonsense!" he said, smoothing her hair that the hat had fallen away from.

"Never! Never! I wish I were a mat for you to walk on. I want to crawl on my hands and knees for you. I'll never leave you, Gerald--never!"

"My beautiful Hester!" he said, unsteadily, and then again, "Nonsense!"

But, almost on the moment, the man nurse returned and she was obliged to

leave him, but not without throbbing promises of the to-morrow's return, and then there took place, downstairs in an anteroom, a long, a closeted, and very private interview with a surgeon and more red tape and filing of applications. She was so weak from crying that a nurse was called finally to help her through the corridors to her car.

Gerald's left lung was burned out and he had three, possibly four, weeks to live.

All the way home, in her tan limousine with the little yellow curtains, she sat quite upright, away from the upholstery, crying down her uncovered face, but a sudden, an exultant determination hardening in her mind.

That night a strange conversation took place in the Riverside Drive apartment. She sat on Wheeler's left knee, toying with his platinum chain, a strained, a rather terrible pallor out in her face, but the sobs well under her voice, and its modulation about normal. She had been talking for over two hours, silencing his every interruption until he had fallen quite still.

"And--and that's all, Wheeler," she ended up. "I've told you everything. We were never more than just--friends--Gerald and me. You must take my word for it, because I swear it before God."

"I take your word, Hester," he said, huskily.

"And there he lies, Wheeler, without--without any eyes in his head. Just as if they'd been burned out by irons. And he--he smiles when he talks. That's the awful part. Smiles like--well, I guess like the angel he--he almost is. You see, he says it's a glory to carry the wounds of his country. Just think! just think! that boy to feel that, the way he lies there!"

"Poor boy! Poor, poor boy!"

"Gerald's like that. So--so full of faith. And, Wheeler, he thinks he's going to get well and lead a useful life like they teach the blind to do. He reminds me of one of those Greek statues down at the Athens Café.

You know--broken. That's it; he's a broken statue."

"Poor fellow! Poor fellow! Do something for him. Buy the finest fruit in the town for him. Send a case of wine. Two."

"I--I think I must be torn to pieces inside, Wheeler, the way I've cried."

"Poor little girl!"

"Wheeler?"

"Now, now," he said; "taking it so to heart won't do no good. It's rotten, I know, but worrying won't help. Got me right upset, too. Come, get it off your mind. Let's take a ride. Doll up; you look a bit peaked. Come now, and to-morrow we'll buy out the town for him."

"Wheeler?" she said. "Wheeler?"

"What?"

"Don't look, Wheeler. I've something else to ask of you--something queer."

"Now, now," he said, his voice hardening but trying to maintain a chiding note; "you know what you promised after the chinchilla--no more this year until--"

"No, no; for God's sake, not that! It's still about Gerald."

"Well?"

"Wheeler, he's only got four weeks to live. Five at the outside."

"Now, now, girl; we've been all over that."

"He loves me, Wheeler, Gerald does."

"Yes?" dryly.

"It would be like doing something decent--the only decent thing I've done in all my life, Wheeler, almost like doing something for the war, the way these women in the pretty white caps have done, and you know we--we haven't turned a finger for it except to--to gain--if I was to--to marry Gerald for those few weeks, Wheeler. I know it's a--rotten sacrifice, but I guess that's the only kind I'm capable of making."

He sat squat, with his knees spread.

"You crazy?" he said.

"It would mean, Wheeler, his dying happy. He doesn't know it's all up with him. He'd be made happy for the poor little rest of his life. He loves me. You see, Wheeler, I was his first--his only sweetheart. I'm on a pedestal, he says, in his dreams. I never told you--but that boy was willing to marry me, Wheeler, knowing--some--of the things I am. He's always carried round a dream of me, you see--no, you wouldn't see, but I've been--well, I guess sort of a medallion that won't tarnish in his heart. Wheeler, for the boy's few weeks he has left? Wheeler?"

"Well, I'll be hanged!"

"I'm not turning holy, Wheeler. I am what I am. But that boy lying out there--I can't bear it! It wouldn't make any difference with us--afterward. You know where you stand with me and for always, but it would mean the dying happy of a boy who fought for us. Let me marry that boy, Wheeler. Let his light go out in happiness. Wheeler? Please, Wheeler?" He would not meet her eyes. "Wheeler?"

"Go to it, Hester," he said, coughing about in his throat and rising to walk away. "Bring him here and give him the fat of the land. You can

count on me to keep out of the way. Go to it," he repeated.

And so they were married, Hester holding his hand beside the hospital cot, the man nurse and doctor standing by, and the chaplain incanting the immemorial words. A bar of sunshine lay across the bed, and Gerald pronounced each "I will" in a lifted voice that carried to the four corners of the little room. She was allowed to stay that night past hospital hours, and they talked with the dusk flowing over them.

"Hester, Hester," he said, "I should have had the strength to hold out against your making this terrible sacrifice."

"It's the happiest hour of my life," she said, kissing him.

"I feel well enough to get up now, sweetheart."

"Gerald, don't force. You've weeks ahead before you are ready for that."

"But to-morrow, dear, home! In whose car are you calling for me to-morrow to take me _home_?"

"In a friend's, dearest."

"Won't I be crowding up our little apartment? Describe it again to me, dearest--our _home_."

"It's so little, Gerald. Three rooms and the littlest, babyest kitchen. When you're once up, I'll teach its every corner to you."

Tears seeped through the line where his lids had been, and it was almost more than she could bear.

"I'll make it up to you, though, Hester. I know I should have been

strong enough to hold out against your marrying me, but I'll make it up. I've a great scheme; a sort of braille system of accountancy--"

"Please, Gerald--not now!"

"If only, Hester, I felt easier about the finances. Will your savings stand the strain? Your staying at home from your work this way--and then me--"

"Gerald dear, I've told you so often--I've saved more than we need."

"My girl!"

"My dear, my dear!" she said.

* * * * *

They moved him with hardly a jar in an army ambulance, and with the yellow limousine riding alongside to be of possible aid, and she had the bed stripped of its laces and cool with linen for him, and he sighed out when they placed him on it and would not let go her hand.

"What a feeling of space for so little a room!"

"It's the open windows, love."

He lay back tiredly.

"What sweet linen!"

"I shopped it for you."

"You, too--you're in linen, Hester?"

"A percale shirt waist. I shopped it for you, too."

"Give me your hand," he said, and pressed a string of close kisses into its palm.

The simplicity of the outrageous subterfuge amazed even her. She held hothouse grapes at two dollars a pound to his lips, and he ate them through a smile.

"Naughty, extravagant girl!" he said.

"I saw them on a fruit stand for thirty cents, and couldn't resist."

"Never mind; I'll make it up to you."

Later, he asked for braille books, turning his sightless face toward her as he studied, trying to concentrate through the pain in his lung.

"If only you wouldn't insist upon the books awhile yet, dear. The doctor says it's too soon."

"I feel so strong, Hester, with you near, and, besides, I must start the pot boiling."

She kissed down into the high nap of his hair, softly.

Evenings, she read to him newspaper accounts of his fellow-soldiers, and the day of the peace, for which he had paid so terribly, she rolled his bed, alone, with a great tugging and straining, to the open window, where the wind from the river could blow in against him and steamboat whistles shoot up like rockets.

She was so inexpressibly glad for the peace day. Somehow, it seemed easier and less blackly futile to give him up.

Of Wheeler for three running weeks she had not a glimpse, and then, one day, he sent up a hamper, not a box, but an actual trunk of roses, and she, in turn, sent them up the back way to Kitty's flat, not wanting even their fragrance released.

With Kitty there were little hurried confabs each day outside the apartment door in the hallway before the elevator shaft. A veil of awe seemed to wrap the Drew woman.

"I can't get it out of my head, Hester. It's like a fairy story, and, in another way, it's a scream--Wheeler standing for this."

"Sh-h, Kitty! His ears are so sensitive."

"Quit shushing me every time I open my mouth. Poor kid! Let me have a look at him. He wouldn't know."

"No! No!"

"God! if it wasn't so sad it would be a scream--Wheeler footing the bills!"

"Oh--you! Oh--oh--you!"

"All right, all right! Don't take the measles over it. I'm going. Here's some chicken broth I brought down. Ed sent it up to me from Sherry's."

But Hester poured it into the sink for some nameless reason, and brewed some fresh from a fowl she tipped the hallboy a dollar to go out and purchase.

She slept on a cot at the foot of his bed, so sensitive to his waking that almost before he came up to consciousness she was at his side. All day she wore the little white shirt waists, a starched one fresh each morning, and at night scratchy little unlaced nightgowns with long sleeves and high yokes. He liked to run his hand along the crispness of the fabric.

"I love you in cool stuff, Hester. You're so cool yourself, I always think of you in the little white waist and blue skirt. You remember, dear--Finleys' annual?"

"I--I'm going to dress like that for you always, Gerald."

"I won't let you be going back to work for long, sweetheart. I've some plans up my sleeve, I have."

"Yes! Yes!"

But when the end did come, it was with as much of a shock as if she had not been for days expecting it. The doctor had just left, puncturing his arm and squirting into his poor tired system a panacea for the pain. But he would not react to it, fighting down the drowsiness.

"Hester," he said, suddenly, and a little weakly, "lean down, sweetheart, and kiss me--long--long--"

She did, and it was with the pressure of her lips to his that he died.

* * * * *

It was about a week after the funeral that Wheeler came back. She was on the _chaise-longue_ that had been dragged out into the parlor, in the

webbiest of white negligées, a little large-eyed, a little subdued, but sweetening the smile she turned toward him by a trick she had of lifting the brows.

"Hel-lo, Wheeler!" she said, raising her cheek to be kissed.

He trailed his lips, but did not seek her mouth, sitting down rather awkwardly and in the spread-kneed fashion he had.

"Well, girl--you all right?"

"You helped," she said.

"It gave me a jolt, too. I made over twenty-five thousand to the Red Cross on the strength of it."

"Thank you, Wheeler."

"Lord!" he said, rising and rubbing his hands together. "Give us a couple of fingers to drink, honey; I'm cotton-mouthed."

She reached languidly for a blue-enameled bell, lying back, with her arms dangling and her smile out. Then, as if realizing that the occasion must be lifted, turned her face to him.

"Old bummer!" she said, using one of her terms of endearment for him and two-thirds closing her eyes. Then did he stoop and kiss her roundly on the lips.

* * * * *

For the remainder of this tale, I could wish for a pen supernally dipped, or for a metaphysician's plating to my vernacular, or for the

linguistic patois of that land off somewhere to the west of Life. Or maybe just a neurologist's chart of Hester's nerve history would help.

In any event, after an evening of musical comedy and of gelatinous dancing, Hester awoke at four o'clock the next morning out of an hour of sound sleep, leaping to her knees there in bed like a quick flame, her gesture shooting straight up toward the jointure of wall and ceiling.

"Gerald!" she called, her smoky black hair floating around her and her arms cutting through the room's blackness. "Gerald!" Suddenly the room was not black. It was light with the Scandinavian blondness of Gerald, the head of him nebulous there above the pink-satin canopy of her dressing table, and, more than that, the drained lakes of his sockets were deep with eyes. Yes, in all their amazing blueness, but queerly sharpened to steel points that went through Hester and through her as if bayonets were pushing into her breasts and her breathing.

"Gerald!" she shrieked, in one more cry that curdled the quiet, and sat up in bed, trembling and hugging herself, and breathing in until her lips were drawn shudderingly against her teeth like wind-sucked window shades.

"Gerald!" And then the picture did a sort of moving-picture fade-out, and black Lottie came running with her hair grotesquely greased and flattened to take out the kink, and gave her a drink of water with the addition of two drops from a bottle, and turned on the night light and went back to bed.

The next morning Hester carried about what she called "a head," and, since it was Wheeler's day at Rosencranz, remained in bed until three o'clock, Kitty curled at the foot of it the greater part of the forenoon.

"It was the rotten night did me up. Dreams! Ugh! dreams!"

"No wonder," diagnosed Kitty, sweetly. "Indigestion from having your cake and eating it."

At three she dressed and called for her car, driving down to the Ivy Funeral Rooms, a Gothic Thanatopsis, set, with one of those laughs up her sleeves in which the vertical city so loves to indulge, right in the heart of the town, between an automobile-accessory shop and a quick-lunch room. Gerald had been buried from there with simple flag-draped service in the Gothic chapel that was protected from the view and roar of the Elevated trains by suitably stained windows. There was a check in Hester's purse made out for an amount that corresponded to the statement she had received from the Ivy Funeral Rooms. And right here again, for the sake of your elucidation, I could wish at least for the neurologist's chart. At the very door to the establishment--with one foot across the threshold, in fact--she paused, her face tilted toward the corner where wall and ceiling met, and at whatever she saw there her eyes dilated widely and her left hand sprang to her bosom as if against the incision of quick steel. Then, without even entering, she rushed back to her car again, urging her chauffeur, at the risk of every speed regulation, homeward.

That was the beginning of purgatorial weeks that were soon to tell on Hester. They actually brought out a streak of gray through her hair, which Lottie promptly dyed and worked under into the lower part of her coiffure. For herself, Hester would have let it remain.

Wheeler was frankly perplexed. God knows it was bad enough to be called upon to endure streaks of unreasonableness at Rosencranz, but Hester wasn't there to show that side to him if she had it. To be pretty frank about it, she was well paid not to. Well paid! He'd done his part. More than nine out of ten would have done. Been made a jay of, if the truth

was known. She was a Christmas-tree bauble and was expected to throw off holiday iridescence. There were limits!

"You're off your feed, girl. Go off by yourself and speed up."

"It's the nights, Gerald. Good God--I mean Wheeler! They kill me. I can't sleep. Can't you get a doctor who will give me stronger drops? He doesn't know my case. Nerves, he calls it. It's this head. If only I could get rid of this head!"

"You women and your nerves and your heads! Are you all alike? Get out and get some exercise. Keep down your gasoline bills and it will send your spirits up. There's such a thing as having it too good."

She tried to meet him in lighter vein after that, dressing her most bizarrely, and greeting him one night in a batik gown, a new process of dyeing that could be flamboyant and narrative in design. This one, a long, sinuous robe that enveloped her slimness like a flame, beginning down around the train in a sullen smoke and rushing up to her face in a burst of crimson.

He thought her so exquisitely rare that he was not above the poor, soggy device of drinking his dinner wine from the cup of her small crimson slipper, and she dangled on his knee like the dangerous little flame she none too subtly purported to be, and he spanked her quickly and softly across the wrists because she was too nervous to hold the match steadily enough for his cigar to take light, and then kissed away all the mock sting.

But the next morning, at the fateful four o'clock, and in spite of four sleeping-drops, Lottie on the cot at the foot of her bed, and the night light burning, she awoke on the crest of such a shriek that a stiletto

might have slit the silence, the end of the sheet crammed up and into her mouth, and, ignoring all of Lottie's calming, sat up on her knees, her streaming eyes on the jointure of wall and ceiling, where the open, accusing ones of Gerald looked down at her. It was not that they were terrible eyes. They were full of the sweet blue, and clear as lakes. It was only that they knew. Those eyes _knew. They knew!_ She tried the device there at four o'clock in the morning of tearing up the still unpaid check to the Ivy Funeral Rooms, and then she curled up in bed with her hand in the negro maid's and her face half buried in the pillow.

"Help me, Lottie!" she begged; "help me!"

"Law! Pore child! Gettin' the horrors every night thisaway! I've been through it before with other ladies, but I never saw a case of the sober horrors befoh. Looks like they's the worst of all. Go to sleep, child. I's holdin'."

You see, Lottie had looked in on life where you and I might not. A bird's-eye view may be very, very comprehensive, but a domestic's-eye view can sometimes be very, very close.

And then, one night, after Hester had beat her hands down into the mattress and implored Gerald to close his accusing eyes, she sat up in bed, waiting for the first streak of dawn to show itself, railing at the pain in her head.

"God! My head! Rub it, Lottie! My head! My eyes! The back of my neck!"

The next morning she did what you probably have been expecting she would do. She rose and dressed, sending Lottie to bed for a needed rest. Dressed herself in the little old blue-serge suit that had been hanging

in the very back of a closet for four years, with a five-and two ten-dollar bills pinned into its pocket, and pressed the little blue sailor hat down on the smooth, winglike quality of her hair. She looked smaller, peculiarly, indescribably younger. She wrote Wheeler a note, dropping it down the mail-chute in the hall, and then came back, looking about rather aimlessly for something she might want to pack. There was nothing; so she went out quite bare and simply, with all her lovely jewels in the leather case on the upper shelf of the bedroom closet, as she had explained to Wheeler in the note.

That afternoon she presented herself to Lichtig. He was again as you would expect--round-bellied, and wore his cigar up obliquely from one corner of his mouth. He engaged her immediately at an increase of five dollars a week, and as she was leaving with the promise to report at eight-thirty the next morning he pinched her cheek, she pulling away angrily.

"None of that!"

"My mistake," he apologized.

She considered it promiscuous and cheap, and you know her aversion for cheapness.

Then she obtained, after a few forays in and out of brownstone houses in West Forty-fifth Street, one of those hall bedrooms so familiar to human-interest stories--the iron-bed, washstand, and slop-jar kind. There was a five-dollar advance required. That left her twenty dollars.

She shopped a bit then in an Eighth Avenue department store, and, with the day well on the wane, took a street car up to the Ivy Funeral Rooms. This time she entered, but the proprietor did not recognize her until she explained. As you know, she looked smaller and younger, and there

was no tan car at the curb.

"I want to pay this off by the week," she said, handing him out the statement and a much-folded ten-dollar bill. He looked at her, surprised. "Yes," she said, her teeth biting off the word in a click.

"Certainly," he replied, handing her out a receipt for the ten.

"I will pay five dollars a week hereafter."

"That will stretch it out to twenty-eight weeks," he said, still doubtfully.

"I can't help it; I must."

"Certainly," he said, "that will be all right," but looked puzzled.

That night she slept in the hall bedroom in the Eighth Avenue, machine-stitched nightgown. She dropped off about midnight, praying not to awaken at four. But she did--with a slight start, sitting up in bed, her eyes where the wall and ceiling joined.

Gerald's face was there, and his blue eyes were open, but the steel points were gone. They were smiling eyes. They seemed to embrace her, to wash her in their fluid.

All her fear and the pain in her head were gone. She sat up, looking at him, the tears streaming down over her smile and her lips moving.

Then, sighing out like a child, she lay back on the pillow, turned over, and went to sleep.

* * * * *

And this is the story of Hester which so insisted to be told. I think she must have wanted you to know. And wanted Gerald to know that you know, and, in the end, I rather think she wanted God to know.

Elizabeth Eliza joined the Circumambient Club with the idea that it would be a long time before she, a new member, would have to read a paper. She would have time to hear the other papers read, and to see how it was done; and she would find it easy when her turn came. By that time she would have some ideas; and long before she would be called upon, she would have leisure to sit down and write out something. But a year passed away, and the time was drawing near. She had, meanwhile, devoted herself to her studies, and had tried to inform herself on all subjects by way of preparation. She had consulted one of the old members of the Club as to the choice of a subject.

"Oh, write about anything," was the answer,--"anything you have been thinking of."

Elizabeth Eliza was forced to say she had not been thinking lately. She had not had time. The family had moved, and there was always an excitement about something, that prevented her sitting down to think.

"Why not write on your family adventures?" asked the old member.

Elizabeth Eliza was sure her mother would think it made them too public; and most of the Club papers, she observed, had some thought in them. She preferred to find an idea.

So she set herself to the occupation of thinking. She went out on the piazza to think; she stayed in the house to think. She tried a corner of

the china-closet. She tried thinking in the cars, and lost her pocket-book; she tried it in the garden, and walked into the strawberry bed. In the house and out of the house, it seemed to be the same,--she could not think of anything to think of. For many weeks she was seen sitting on the sofa or in the window, and nobody disturbed her. "She is thinking about her paper," the family would say, but she only knew that she could not think of anything.

Agamemnon told her that many writers waited till the last moment, when inspiration came, which was much finer than anything studied. Elizabeth Eliza thought it would be terrible to wait till the last moment, if the inspiration should not come! She might combine the two ways,--wait till a few days before the last, and then sit down and write anyhow. This would give a chance for inspiration, while she would not run the risk of writing nothing.

She was much discouraged. Perhaps she had better give it up? But, no; everybody wrote a paper: if not now, she would have to do it some time!

And at last the idea of a subject came to her! But it was as hard to find a moment to write as to think. The morning was noisy, till the little boys had gone to school; for they had begun again upon their regular course, with the plan of taking up the study of cider in October. And after the little boys had gone to school, now it was one thing, now it was another,--the china-closet to be cleaned, or one of the neighbors in to look at the sewing-machine. She tried after dinner, but would fall asleep. She felt that evening would be the true time, after the cares of the day were over.

The Peterkins had wire mosquito-nets all over the house,--at every door and every window. They were as eager to keep out the flies as the mosquitoes. The doors were all furnished with strong springs, that pulled the doors to as soon as they were opened. The little boys had

practised running in and out of each door, and slamming it after them. This made a good deal of noise, for they had gained great success in making one door slam directly after another, and at times would keep up a running volley of artillery, as they called it, with the slamming of the doors. Mr. Peterkin, however, preferred it to flies.

So Elizabeth Eliza felt she would venture to write of a summer evening with all the windows open.

She seated herself one evening in the library, between two large kerosene lamps, with paper, pen, and ink before her. It was a beautiful night, with the smell of the roses coming in through the mosquito-nets, and just the faintest odor of kerosene by her side. She began upon her work. But what was her dismay! She found herself immediately surrounded with mosquitoes. They attacked her at every point. They fell upon her hand as she moved it to the inkstand; they hovered, buzzing, over her head; they planted themselves under the lace of her sleeve. If she moved her left hand to frighten them off from one point, another band fixed themselves upon her right hand. Not only did they flutter and sting, but they sang in a heathenish manner, distracting her attention as she tried to write, as she tried to waft them off. Nor was this all. Myriads of June-bugs and millers hovered round, flung themselves into the lamps, and made disagreeable funeral-pyres of themselves, tumbling noisily on her paper in their last unpleasant agonies. Occasionally one darted with a rush toward Elizabeth Eliza's head.

If there was anything Elizabeth Eliza had a terror of it was a June-bug. She had heard that they had a tendency to get into the hair. One had been caught in the hair of a friend of hers, who had long, luxuriant hair. But the legs of the June-bug were caught in it like fishhooks, and it had to be cut out, and the June-bug was only extricated by sacrificing large masses of the flowing locks.

Elizabeth Eliza flung her handkerchief over her head. Could she sacrifice what hair she had to the claims of literature? She gave a cry of dismay.

The little boys rushed in a moment to the rescue. They flapped newspapers, flung sofa-cushions; they offered to stand by her side with fly-whisks, that she might be free to write. But the struggle was too exciting for her, and the flying insects seemed to increase. Moths of every description--large brown moths, small, delicate white millers--whirled about her, while the irritating hum of the mosquito kept on more than ever. Mr. Peterkin and the rest of the family came in to inquire about the trouble. It was discovered that each of the little boys had been standing in the opening of a wire door for some time, watching to see when Elizabeth Eliza would have made her preparations and would begin to write. Countless numbers of dorbugs and winged creatures of every description had taken occasion to come in. It was found that they were in every part of the house.

"We might open all the blinds and screens," suggested Agamemnon, "and make a vigorous onslaught and drive them all out at once."

"I do believe there are more inside than out now," said Solomon John.

"The wire nets, of course," said Agamemnon, "keep them in now."

"We might go outside," proposed Solomon John, "and drive in all that are left. Then to-morrow morning, when they are all torpid, kill them and make collections of them."

Agamemnon had a tent which he had provided in case he should ever go to the Adirondacks, and he proposed using it for the night. The little boys were wild for this.

Mrs. Peterkin thought she and Elizabeth Eliza would prefer trying to sleep in the house. But perhaps Elizabeth Eliza would go on with her paper with more comfort out of doors.

A student's lamp was carried out, and she was established on the steps of the back piazza, while screens were all carefully closed to prevent the mosquitoes and insects from flying out. But it was no use. There were outside still swarms of winged creatures that plunged themselves about her, and she had not been there long before a huge miller flung himself into the lamp and put it out. She gave up for the evening.

Still the paper went on. "How fortunate," exclaimed Elizabeth Eliza, "that I did not put it off till the last evening!" Having once begun, she persevered in it at every odd moment of the day. Agamemnon presented

her with a volume of "Synonymes," which was a great service to her. She read her paper, in its various stages, to Agamemnon first, for his criticism, then to her father in the library, then to Mr. and Mrs. Peterkin together, next to Solomon John, and afterward to the whole family assembled. She was almost glad that the lady from Philadelphia was not in town, as she wished it to be her own unaided production. She declined all invitations for the week before the night of the Club, and on the very day she kept her room with eau sucrée, that she might save her voice. Solomon John provided her with Brown's Bronchial Troches when the evening came, and Mrs. Peterkin advised a handkerchief over her head, in case of June-bugs.

It was, however, a cool night. Agamemnon escorted her to the house.

The Club met at Ann Maria Bromwick's. No gentlemen were admitted to the regular meetings. There were what Solomon John called "occasional annual meetings," to which they were invited, when all the choicest papers

of the year were re-read.

Elizabeth Eliza was placed at the head of the room, at a small table, with a brilliant gas-jet on one side. It was so cool the windows could be closed. Mrs. Peterkin, as a guest, sat in the front row.

This was her paper, as Elizabeth Eliza read it, for she frequently inserted fresh expressions:--

THE SUN

It is impossible that much can be known about it. This is why we have taken it up as a subject. We mean the sun that lights us by day and leaves us by night. In the first place, it is so far off. No measuring-tapes could reach it; and both the earth and the sun are moving about us, that it would be difficult to adjust ladders to reach it, if we could. Of course, people have written about it, and there are those who have told us how many miles off it is. But it is a very large number, with a great many figures in it; and though it is taught in most if not all of our public schools, it is a chance if any one of the scholars remembers exactly how much it is.

It is the same with its size. We can not, as we have said, reach it by ladders to measure it; and if we did reach it, we should have no measuring-tapes large enough, and those that shut up with springs are difficult to use in a high places. We are told, it is true, in a great many of the school-books, the size of the sun; but, again, very few of those who have learned the number have been able to remember it after they have recited it, even if they remembered it then. And almost all of the scholars have lost their school-books, or have neglected to carry them home, and so they are not able to refer to them,--I mean, after leaving school. I must say that is the case with me, I should say with

us, though it was different. The older ones gave their school-books to the younger ones, who took them back to school to lose them, or who have destroyed them when there were no younger ones to go to school. I should say there are such families. What I mean is, the fact that in some families there are no younger children to take off the school-books. But even then they are put away on upper shelves, in closets or in attics, and seldom found if wanted,--if then, dusty.

Of course, we all know of a class of persons called astronomers, who might be able to give us information on the subject in hand, and who probably do furnish what information is found in school-books. It should be observed, however, that these astronomers carry on their observations always in the night. Now, it is well known that the sun does not shine in the night. Indeed, that is one of the peculiarities of the night, that there is no sun to light us, so we have to go to bed as long as there is nothing else we can do without its light, unless we use lamps, gas, or kerosene, which is very well for the evening, but would be expensive all night long; the same with candles. How, then, can we depend upon their statements, if not made from their own observation,--I mean, if they never saw the sun?

We can not expect that astronomers should give us any valuable information with regard to the sun, which they never see, their occupation compelling them to be up at night. It is quite likely that they never see it; for we should not expect them to sit up all day as well as all night, as, under such circumstances, their lives would not last long.

Indeed, we are told that their name is taken from the word _aster_, which means "star;" the word is "aster--know--more." This, doubtless, means that they know more about the stars than other things. We see, therefore, that their knowledge is confined to the stars, and we can not trust what they have to tell us of the sun.

There are other asters which should not be mixed up with these,--we mean those growing by the wayside in the fall of the year. The astronomers, from their nocturnal habits, can scarcely be acquainted with them; but as it does not come within our province, we will not inquire.

We are left, then, to seek our own information about the sun. But we are met with a difficulty. To know a thing, we must look at it. How can we look at the sun? It is so very bright that our eyes are dazzled in gazing upon it. We have to turn away, or they would be put out,--the sight, I mean. It is true, we might use smoked glass, but that is apt to come off on the nose. How, then, if we can not look at it, can we find out about it? The noonday would seem to be the better hour, when it is the sunniest; but, besides injuring the eyes, it is painful to the neck to look up for a long time. It is easy to say that our examination of this heavenly body should take place at sunrise, when we could look at it more on a level, without having to endanger the spine. But how many people are up at sunrise? Those who get up early do it because they are compelled to, and have something else to do than look at the sun.

The milkman goes forth to carry the daily milk, the ice-man to leave the daily ice. But either of these would be afraid of exposing their vehicles to the heating orb of day,--the milkman afraid of turning the milk, the ice-man timorous of melting his ice--and they probably avoid those directions where they shall meet the sun's rays. The student, who might inform us, has been burning the midnight oil. The student is not in the mood to consider the early sun.

There remains to us the evening, also,--the leisure hour of the day. But, alas! our houses are not built with an adaptation to this subject. They are seldom made to look toward the sunset. A careful inquiry and close observation, such as have been called for in preparation of this paper, have developed the fact that not a single house in this town faces the sunset! There may be windows looking that way, but in such a

case there is always a barn between. I can testify to this from personal observations, because, with my brothers, we have walked through the several streets of this town with note-books, carefully noting every house looking upon the sunset, and have found none from which the sunset could be studied. Sometimes it was the next house, sometimes a row of houses, or its own wood-house, that stood in the way.

Of course, a study of the sun might be pursued out of doors. But in summer, sunstroke would be likely to follow; in winter, neuralgia and cold. And how could you consult your books, your dictionaries, your encyclopædias? There seems to be no hour of the day for studying the sun. You might go to the East to see it at its rising, or to the West to gaze upon its setting, but--you don't.

Here Elizabeth Eliza came to a pause. She had written five different endings, and had brought them all, thinking, when the moment came, she would choose one of them. She was pausing to select one, and inadvertently said, to close the phrase, "you don't." She had not meant to use the expression, which she would not have thought sufficiently imposing,--it dropped out unconsciously,--but it was received as a close with rapturous applause.

She had read slowly, and now that the audience applauded at such a length, she had time to feel she was much exhausted and glad of an end. Why not stop there, though there were some pages more? Applause, too, was heard from the outside. Some of the gentlemen had come,--Mr. Peterkin, Agamemnon, and Solomon John, with others,--and demanded admission.

"Since it is all over, let them in," said Ann Maria Bromwick.

Elizabeth Eliza assented, and rose to shake hands with her applauding friends.

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE, by Mary E. Wilkins

From *The Love of Parson Lord and Other Stories* (first pub 1900)

"The Tree of Knowledge," so called by the people who dwelt in its vicinity, stood on the border of the turnpike road to Boston. It was an ancient elm, as venerable as any prophet, with the wide benediction of his giant arms and the shelter of his green mantle on a hot noon-tide.

And there was a great hollow in the mighty trunk of the tree, and therein was a sack of calf-skin, cunningly fitted for protection of its precious contents against rain and dampness. Every day the driver of the Boston stage drew in his mettlesome steeds beside the old elm and plunged a hasty hand into the depths of the calf-skin sack. There was no post-office in this tiny settlement, and therefore no way of sending or obtaining the mail except through the friendly offices of the driver and the tree.

The stage dashed down the turnpike every night with a rattling roar of wheels, which carried far, and caused the men in distant hay-fields and wood-lots to stand and listen with hollowed hands at ears, and remark, with that small and primitive triumph which comes from the unquestionable evidence of the senses, "There's the stage-coach."

Every night, just after the passing of the stage, came young Annie Pryor, to see if perchance she might glean anything from its leavings for herself.

Annie would hasten down the road in the summer-time, ruffling to the wind like a rose, with her muslins and laces and ribbons. In the winter season she went clad from neck to heel in a great red cloak, which parted the pale dusk like the red breast of a robin as she danced along.

No matter how fast she came, she always paused a moment before she thrust her little hand into the secret place of the old elm in search of a letter, as if she were collecting her courage for a possible disappointment.

But always once in a fortnight, and sometimes oftener, she found there a letter for herself, addressed in a handwriting very fine and clearly cut, with elegant curves and shadings, but always large, with even an exaggeration and affectation of boldness, to prove beyond doubt that it was a man's. Always when Annie secured her letter, and turning the superscription to the light, saw the handwriting, a soft blush came over her face and a look of rapture and wonder into her eyes.

She always hid the letter in the lowest depths of her pocket, and never by any chance read it until after she was home, and sometimes not until she went to bed, and was sure that nobody would see her face until the look which it had worn during the reading had faded away. However, there was nobody in the house to see her except her elder sister, Cornelia, and the servant-woman, Deborah Noyes, who had lived with them ever since Annie was born; but their eyes were very sharp and pitiless with love.

There never had been and never would be letters like these, according to Annie Pryor's judgment, which was biassed by the wisdom of utter innocence of the world, and a fancy as holy in its picturings as a Fra Angelico's. As all women were angels to him, so were all men angels to her. Annie read these letters as she read her Bible, with her heart and her pulses aglow indeed with a warmth which confused her, but with her imagination in the holy of holies, and crowning the writer with an aureole of beauty and sanctity.

She had never seen him in the flesh, and had no idea concerning his identity. The name signed to the letters was clearly a fictitious one — "David Amicus." In those days sentiment was in its fulness of glory, and had not yet overlapped its own height to the descent of the ridiculous. People, especially women, regarded its farthest flights in their correspondence seriously, and with most ardent approbation.

So Annie Pryor, reading with flutterings and palpitations innumerable these

epistles signed with a name evidently inspired by Scripture and Latin and sentimentality, and full of such lofty conclusions that the writer seemed more than mortal man, could he exemplify them in himself, was in a rapture of enthusiasm and admiration. She was in love with a man whom she had never seen, and who represented to her mind something between a Messiah and a Crusader.

But, after all, the affection of her maiden heart was awakened by nothing except the love which made itself evident through all the lofty verbosity of sentiment, like the strong sweetness of honey. Annie tasted, smelled, and inbreathed the fervent love and the tender glorification of herself in the letters, and her heart leaped to meet it, all in the dark, but none the less surely.

Annie never answered these letters; she never dreamed of such a thing; indeed, there was no address given. She was quite contented to respond silently to all this graciousness of affection, not having as yet arrived at such an understanding of love that its need of herself could occur to her and fill her with distress.

Annie had received her first letter from her unknown admirer when she had just passed her seventeenth birthday. The week before, she had heard of the marriage of the only girl friend whom she had ever known, who had moved to another village with her parents two years before. Annie returned from the neighbor's where she had heard the news, her eyes big with wonder and a certain vague trouble.

She seated herself at a window and remained for some time, looking out without speaking. Then she said, slowly and timidly, to her sister Cornelia, who was sitting opposite embroidering a fine cambric frill for her, "Cornelia."

"What is it, love?" asked Cornelia, softly.

The two were half-sisters; there was a difference of many years in their ages, and a great dissimilarity in their figures. Cornelia was extremely tall and full of a willowy sinuosity, and Annie was almost as small and slight as a child, and as weakly pliable in her movements; still, the likeness to their common father was in their faces. Their voices were widely different too, Annie's having a thin sweetness of quality like a reed, with no reserve, and Cornelia's being not low, but hushed. Cornelia gave the impression of being reined in, either by herself, in opposition to the urgings of Providence, or by Providence, in opposition to her own desire for bolting. She looked at Annie now with a mild gravity of expression, which concealed a quick warmth as of fire. "What is it, love?" she repeated, when the young girl did not answer at once, but still hesitated with that look of vague trouble in her eyes.

"Rebecca is married," Annie said, slowly.

"Yes," assented Cornelia, who never seemed surprised.

"She is married to a young man in Greenfield, where they went to live, her aunt Maria told me."

Cornelia saw that Annie's eyes were full of tears.

"Are you hurt because Rebecca did not write you about her marriage, dear?" she asked, tenderly.

"No; she has written me very seldom since she went away. Her aunt said she would write soon. She has been very busy making her wedding clothes. She has hem-stitched and fagoted everything, and trimmed all her bed-linen with knitted lace." Annie looked at Cornelia with a kind of abashed directness. "Cornelia, when do you think I shall be married?"

Cornelia smiled; then her mouth drew down at the corners. "In the Lord's good time, I trust, love," she replied.

"I hope it will be before long," said Annie, simply and seriously; "or maybe I shall not be married at all. I am seventeen — two months older than Rebecca was."

"Are you not contented and happy as you are, love?" asked Cornelia, and there was a delicate intonation of reproach in her voice.

Then Annie's heart smote her. "Oh, dear Cornelia," she cried out, sweetly, "of course I am happy and contented, but —" then she stopped again.

"I am contented and happy since I have you. I ask for nothing more. You have filled my cup of blessing up full, Annie."

"But I have no Annie," the younger sister rejoined, laughing childishly, "and when I am as old as you, Cornelia, I will have no Annie."

"There is nothing for you to do, for any woman to do, but to trust in the Lord about all such matters," Cornelia said, sternly and with a certain dignity. "If He intends you to have a married life, He will send you some one in good season; if not, and He intends you to be single, you must learn to be contented. Every state has its compensations, and nothing is as unequal as it appears."

"Dear Cornelia," said Annie, abruptly, "was that why you did not get married — just because the Lord did not send you any one?" Annie spoke in a tone of the sweetest and most deprecating curiosity, her face flushing, but Cornelia turned pale as Annie had never seen her, and Deborah Noyes, who had come in and was sweeping the hearth, gave a frightened start.

"I would rather not talk about such matters, love," Cornelia answered, gently, and yet with an accent which filled the younger sister with pain and distress.

"Oh, Cornelia, forgive me!" she faltered out.

Annie had a feeling that she had outraged secrecy and delicacy, and all the more because old Deborah later took her apart and charged her never to ask her sister such questions. "There air things which had better not be talked about," said the old woman, who had been married in her early youth, had the wisdom of experience, and regarded Annie as her own child.

"Oh, Deborah, I did not mean any harm!" Annie returned, piteously.

"I know you didn't," rejoined Deborah; "but there air things which is only betwixt folks and their Maker, and not to be spoke of by their nearest and dearest."

So Annie Pryor, being forbidden to speak, could only think, and as a result of her thought kept her love-letters secret when they began to arrive a week later.

Annie felt quite justified in her secrecy. The dear and noble unknown had signed what was evidently an assumed name; he did not wish his identity discovered, and she had the authority of her elders that there were subjects better not discussed, and between one's self and God.

So Annie hid her love and her letters, and grew and blossomed into fuller life, like a flower which conceals the secret of its growth from even those who tend and love it, keeping always the god that giveth the increase hidden in the shadow of its own life. Annie had always been pretty, but now she grew into such a beauty that even the stolid farmer folk thereabout,

men blunted with toil and the dull fitting of desires to means under the yoke of Providence, turned back to look at her, and the women grew reminiscent and comparative at the sight of her, and glanced in their looking-glasses.

However, she had very few admirers of any kind in this little place, scarcely more than the nucleus of a village. It had always been inconceivable to people why Captain Jonas Pryor, Annie's father, had settled there when he gave up his traffic on the high seas. It may have been that the loneliness and isolation of the place appealed to the man, used to the loneliness and isolation of the sea; at all events, he seemed happy there. However, he had Annie, for whose sake he had quitted his life work and turned his back forever on his good ship, and she was all-sufficient. Captain Pryor had always been a kind father to Cornelia, but she was not like little Annie, the child of his pretty second wife, herself young enough to be his daughter, who had died when he was cruising off the coast of Ceylon.

After Captain Pryor came home he never let Annie out of his sight when he could avoid it, and he was as wroth as he might have been on his quarter-deck, when somebody suggested sending her away to school.

"I guess by the time she knows as much as her sister and I can teach her she will know enough for any woman," he said; "and as for putting that little tender thing in with a parcel of great girls not good enough to tie her shoes, I'll be damned first! I've sailed about enough around this world to get my bearings, and know about as well where the rocks and the quicksands be as the teachers and the parsons, and I guess I'll be full as faithful about shunting her off 'em as they. And as for the rest, I guess Cornelia has been polished high enough to give a little of her shine to her sister."

Cornelia was well fitted to teach her young sister, having graduated at a young ladies' seminary, and having been well grounded in the accomplishments, as well as in some more advanced branches than were usually in vogue in such institutions.

As for Captain Pryor, being determined to keep his darling with him and avoid all necessity for self-reproach, he taught her the rude astronomy acquired during long watches on deck under the expanse of stars, and also, as well as he was able with no opportunity for practical illustration, how to navigate a ship.

He imparted to her his well-tested knowledge of geography, with sundry scornful dissensions from the maps in use. "I tell you all the way to know a coast is by sailing round it," he would say, emphatically, "and it goes out here where that fool has made it go in. Guess he would go to pieces before he had time to say his prayers, if he tried to sail where he has marked water. Don't you ever try to sail a ship according to such bearings, sweetheart."

In fair and mild weather little Annie used to sit with her father on the house-top, around which he had erected a balustrade, and she learned strange lessons of fact and fancy, having for a great treat the looking through her father's spy-glass at the strip of blue sea visible on a clear day, and watching the sails moving along the horizon distance like clouds in the sky. But it did not last long. Captain Pryor was quite an old man, and the breaking-up of the ways of a lifetime shake the foundations of life. He died suddenly when Annie was still only a child, and she was left in the care of her elder sister. She was as safe as she would have been with her own mother. As fond as Annie's father had been of her, it would have been impossible for him to surround her always so impalpably and yet so completely, with such fine and discriminating tenderness. The tenderness of one woman for another is farther reaching in detail than that of a man, because it is given with a fuller understanding of needs. Annie was fenced and ramparted against all evils and roughnesses of life, in all the ways which the patience and loving cunning of two devoted women could devise. They kept her from all evil, and all knowledge of it. They saw to it that her feet were dry, and the food for her imagination clean. She had

seen only the love-illuminated side of her old sea-captain father, whose knowledge of the wickedness on the face of the earth was as securely hidden from the innocent eyes of his daughter as if it had lain at the deepest bottom of the sea. She had never read a novel; she had had only one companion of her own age, a simple girl, whose life had been as sequestered as her own, and Cornelia had never left the two alone long, and taught Annie to tell her what they talked about. There were no young men in the village except one lout of a farmer's lad, who was beyond the reach of her imagination, or, rather, far short of it. Annie regarded him no more than she would have regarded a wayside tree, and he viewed her with Heaven knows what dull acquiescence of admiration, stepping out of her path as stupidly and unquestioningly as one of his own oxen. He being the only other of her own age in the village, it was not surprising that Annie was obliged to draw wholly upon her imagination for the original of her unknown lover. Her mind was an absolute blank as to his reality. She could not, search her memory as she would, recall the face of any man whom she had ever seen who in the least answered to her conception of him. So she fed her love with her own fancy and the noble sentiments and words of ardent and respectful devotion transcribed upon the sheets of foolscap, and many a time, when she was ostensibly seated with her sister at work on her embroidery, she was holding sweetest communion with her lover in that farthest closet of secrecy behind silent lips.

Sometimes, however, since there were forces at work within herself of which she knew nothing, she was not quite happy, and there was a sense of insufficiency in her life. She was reaching the point where dreams would not content her. In those days she took to standing long at the gate in the evening and peering down the country road in the dusk, as if she were looking for some one, and on a moonlight night she sat at her window watching out over the pale illumination of the meadow, instead of going to bed. If the knocker sounded, her heart beat high with anticipation, and every footstep smote her ear like the prophecy of another. She prayed timidly not being sure that such prayers were right, that her lover might

appear to her at the elm some day, instead of his letter, and she became so agitated that she could scarcely breathe or walk steadily on her way thither. She reasoned that he might come on the stage, and wait there for her. Finally she became quite sure that he would do so, and every night arrayed herself with the daintiest care. Her mother had possessed an expensive wardrobe, which had been little worn at her death. Cornelia kept her own finery of youth only for her young sister, and Captain Pryor had been well-to-do for those times. Annie went clad in fine array, in shimmering silks and fine muslins and embroideries, like a princess, but they became her well as concerned her looks and her breeding and her birth. Both Annie's mother and Cornelia's had been of fine old Boston stock, with high claims to gentility.

Annie always waited, by her sister's instructions, until the stage was so far past that nobody could espy her, before she sought the tree; and thus it often happened that her dainty toilets were all unseen except by the loving women at home, who would have thought her fair in rags. Sometimes a sense of impatience and futility came over the young girl as she tied on her hat before the looking-glass and arranged her brown curls to the best advantage. She longed, as naturally and innocently as she might have longed for water when thirsty, for the eyes of her lover to reflect her beauty, that she might see it with its best meaning. This little Annie Pryor, stealing palpitantly down the road to the old tree, was feminine to the heart's core. No power of straining out of her natural line was in her. Noble sentiment was her spiritual bread, and love was her honey. She was fonder of her quiet needle than of any other employment, and her soul seemed to permeate to the farthest hem on her flounces, the scallops of her tucker, and the forked ends of her ribbons, such an entirety of prettiness she was as she walked.

It happened one afternoon in December, when Annie had just passed her eighteenth birthday, that the Boston stage was late, though she did not know it. She had sat in her favorite place by a window, embroidering a

pocket-handkerchief which she privately designed for a feature of her wedding finery, until it was past the usual time for the arrival of the stage; then she rose.

Cornelia looked up from her work at an opposite window. "Wrap yourself up warmly, love," she said, "for it looks cold outside."

Annie put on her red cloak and wound a furry tippet round her throat before she set out. It was cold, and threatening snow. The sky hung low with gray clouds, and there was a stillness which shocked the senses like sound. The presence of the storm seemed to make itself felt, like the presence of life in a dark and silent room. It was almost night, but not dark; somewhere beyond the clouds was the full moon. This little human thing full of life and warmth hurried on like a spark of fire through the quiet of death and storm. She did not meet a living creature nor hear a sound until she was near the old elm. Then she heard the rumble of the approaching stage. "The stage is late," she told herself, in dismay, and did not know what to do. Then she reasoned quickly, while the stage was drawing nearer, that she would not have time to go back and reach the turn into the lane where the Pryor house stood before it was upon her, and made up her mind to the only course of action possible. She stepped aside from the road, and sought the shelter of the wood at the right behind the great elm. The wood was composed of oaks, and white birches waving about in the dusk like white wands of conjurers. Annie went as far into the wood as she deemed necessary to screen herself from prying eyes on the stage-coach, and hid behind an oak, folding her red cloak tightly around her slender form. Then she waited until the stage rolled up. The driver alighted, approached the tree, and was busy for a minute or two beside it. Annie could see quite plainly, as she peeped around the trunk of the oak, the stage with its team of four horses drawn to a slanting curve beside the road. There were no outside passengers except one man on the box, who was holding the lines. She thought that not many had ventured forth on such an inclement day, and with a thrill of her usual disappointment she thought that her

unknown lover had not arrived.

She waited until the driver was back in his place again and had hallooed to his horses, which had moved on with a mighty rattling and jingling; then she stood out from behind the oak and peered around fearfully. All at once she became conscious of something unusual. She had felt, rather than heard, something in the wood near her. She looked behind her, then to the right, then to the left, and saw what it was — a man and a horse standing as motionless as an equestrian statue in a cleared space among the trees.

Annie did not cry out, but she seemed to shrink within herself, and folded her arms with a curious involuntary motion, as if she were fairly hugging herself for protection. The man looked sharply at this slender fair thing, her poor pretty face, wild and white with terror, intent upon his, and remained motionless for a moment, as if uncertain what to do.

Then he stepped forward with a courtly lift and flourish of his broad slouched hat, and all at once Annie's fears fled, for she knew that he had come. She looked up, innocently and quite fearlessly, into the dark, handsome face bent over hers, though the soft pink mounted high to the roots of the curls on her forehead.

"I hope I have not alarmed you, madam," said the man, with the utmost gentleness and deference; and he smiled as he spoke, and Annie's heart quivered under the smile as under a caressing hand.

Still, she answered with considerable dignity, her own young copy of her elder sister's soft state when addressing a stranger. "I was alarmed for a moment, sir, because I had not expected to see any one here," she said; and her voice sounded to the young man like a flute played by some nymph of the winter woods.

"But you are not alarmed now, I trust?" he rejoined, gently.

“No, I am not alarmed now, sir.”

The stranger held his horse by the bridle, and continued to regard Annie. She could not see his face plainly, because it was under the shadow of his broad hat, but she made sure that it was the face of the man of her dreams, and did not belie the sentiments of his letters. In such a tumult of emotion was she that she felt herself hot and cold, and all her pulses were throbbing above her thoughts; but so fine was her breeding, and the instincts inherited from generations of gentlewomen, that she made no sign.

“Allow me to say that I think you are out rather late in such a lonely place,” said the stranger at length, in a tone which he might have used towards a child.

“No, sir; it is quite safe,” replied Annie. “I come here every night for my letters.” She blushed as she said the last, and her eyes fell, since she made sure that he knew all about the letters. She knew that he must be David Amicus, and she wondered what his real name might be.

As she wondered, he told her, with another courtly bow.

“If you will permit me to present myself, I am Harry Carew, at your service,” he said — Annie courtesied — “and I still think it overlate for one so young and fair to be out alone; and I will stand beside the road and keep watch that you are not molested until you are safely home. You do not live far from here?”

“Only a short distance, sir; but I assure you that it is quite safe.”

Annie, and Harry Carew leading his horse, went out to the border of the wood to the old elm, and Annie, with another courtesy, and a gentle “Good-

night," and "Thank you, sir," started down the road.

But the young man called after her, with a half laugh. "You have forgotten to look for your letter," he said; and he laughed again softly, for he thought that it was a letter from a sweetheart that she was expecting, and that the sight of his own handsome face had driven it from her mind; for Harry Carew was not without vanity.

Annie turned back confusedly and thrust her hand into the hollow of the tree, but there was only one letter there, and that for one of the farmers. Then she went her way, thinking that Mr. Harry Carew had it in his mind to jest with her, since he must have known that there would be no letter there.

When Annie reached home and entered the warm room, bright with the hearth fire, and the lamp hung around with rows of glittering prisms, beside which her sister sat, she turned her face away, as if to screen her dazzled eyes after the dusk outside, but in reality to hide her face until it should be under better control. Annie felt as if her meeting with Harry Carew was written in such plain characters upon her face that Cornelia would read all at a glance. She sat at a window and stared out at the night, though Cornelia asked her tenderly if she had not better draw near the fire. She sat there while old Deborah laid the tea-table in the dining-room, with musical clink of glass and silver, and her heart sank at the thought of poor Harry Carew out in the storm, which had begun: the snow was falling fast. She wondered if he would obtain shelter at one of the neighbor's, or if he would ride on to the nearest tavern: it seemed late for that. She wondered what Cornelia would have said had she asked him to come home with her, if it would have been maidenly to do so. She kept her eyes downcast when she sat at the tea-table opposite her sister, but she felt that Cornelia was glancing perplexedly at her face. Cornelia thought that the girl had a strange and unwonted look, and speculated anxiously as to what it might mean. Annie was uneasy under her sister's fond and reflective gaze, and somewhat guilty. She thought that possibly she ought to tell her secret

now, since without doubt Mr. Harry Carew would seek her at her own home before long, possibly the next day. Several times during the evening she was on the verge of confession. Once she said, "Sister —" then stopped.

"What is it, love?" asked Cornelia.

"Nothing," replied Annie.

Cornelia had a subtle sense of disturbance. The sudden repression of confidence from one soul to another may well produce a commotion like that from the stoppage of a wave. "You do not feel ill, I hope, love?" she said, uneasily.

"No, sister," replied Annie.

Annie lighted her candle and went to bed early. She wanted to be alone. The storm had come with all force, and the night was full of the white drive of the snow. The wind had arisen, and came in a steady wall of advance from the northwest. Annie lay in bed listening to it. "It is a dreadful storm, and even a strong man might freeze if he were out in it," she thought. While she had no doubt, the simple romanticism of her nature making it almost incapable of interrogation towards events which coincided with her theories, she was yet somewhat bewildered at the strange advent of her mysterious lover. It was certainly singular that he had appeared in such wise. Annie had no knowledge of heroines of romance, upon which to draw for comparison, but she reflected vaguely that it might have been more according to the fitness of things had Mr. Harry Carew come dashing boldly up the turnpike, and knocking at her door, implored permission to pay his addresses, than for him to lurk in the oak wood on the chance of seeing her when the stage passed.

Still, she had no doubt that Harry Carew was the David Amicus of her letters, and her whole heart went out towards him with trust and love and

the most fervent admiration. She considered him as grand and handsome as a prince in his appearance, and as for his character, were there not the noble sentiments in his letters to vouch for that?

Annie recalled many to herself as she lay there sheltered from the storm in her maiden nest. She had many expressions, word for word, in her memory. Some which she specially admired and treasured ran after this wise — “To walk ever in the path of virtue and honesty, though the hedges set with cruel thorns press close on either side, is to my mind better than to walk in the path of vice, though there be room therein for the wide spreading of purple and fine linen, and the society of the gay and light-minded with whom to pass the time to eternity by song and jest.” And another — “Constancy and the faithful keeping of vows and promises I enjoin upon myself, for I comprehend not how I can be false to another without also being false to my own self.” And another — “I shun intemperance and impurity as I would shun the plague, for I am well aware that you could esteem me no more after my moral death than you could do after my physical, and the wedded bliss towards which I ever look forward as towards an earthly paradise would be forfeited forever.”

“There is no man in the whole world so noble and so good,” thought Annie Pryor, though she had seen Harry Carew only once, and then at a disadvantage, on account of the dusk, and his slouched hat well over his flashing eyes; but by some unwritten law of love those eyes had found their way at once to her soul.

It was midnight before Annie fell asleep; then it was an hour or more before she woke suddenly, with the conviction borne in upon her that there was something unwonted astir.

Annie was timid, but was that night in a state of excitement and exaltation of spirit which was beyond ordinary fear. Without the least hesitation she sprang out of bed, ran to the window, and looked out. The storm was

furious; all the night was a whirlpool of white crystals, yet made faintly luminous by the full moon. She could see dimly the yard in front of the house, and the figure of a man plodding through the snow.

Annie hesitated, not knowing whether to awaken her sister and Deborah, or not; then she decided not. She knew who had come — Mr. Harry Carew, seeking shelter from the storm. He must be nearly spent. She did not see his horse; perhaps that had fallen down exhausted. It would take some time to arouse her sister; there might be some parley before he would be admitted, since they were three lonely women, and there were valuable silver and some jewelry in the house. While they delayed and talked he might fall fainting on the door-stone; she resolved that she would admit him herself.

Annie put on her clothes hurriedly, lighted a candle, and shading it carefully lest the light shine through the cracks of her sister's door across the hall, stole down-stairs to the front door. She drew the bolt and threw the door wide open, and there was nobody there. Then she heard a slight noise in the north parlor, and ran to the door of that and opened it. The wind and snow from an open window came in her face, and her candle would have flickered out had she not carefully shaded it. She dimly perceived a man's figure before her, and spoke at once, though in a hushed and tremulous voice. "Oh," said she, "I am sorry that you had to climb in the window! I am very sorry! I went to the door as fast as I could. I am very sorry!" Then, when he made no response, she spoke again, with the sweetest pity in her voice: "I fear you are overcome with the cold and the storm," she said, "you have been out in it so long. Please come out in the other room, where the fire is. It is covered, but I will soon have it blazing again, and the room cannot be cold yet. Please come out in the other room, and I will get some wine for you; I fear that you are almost exhausted."

Then there was a smothered ejaculation in return, which might mean almost anything; then silence. The shadowy figure of the man was

motionless. Annie stood regarding him with hesitation and fear, lest he might be unable to do as she said, and might at any minute fall on the floor at her feet.

“Oh,” she pleaded, falteringly, “I hope you are able to come. Pray come, if you can, or — or — would you like me to help you?”

Annie made a timid motion towards the man as she spoke; then, to her intense relief, he answered her in a smothered voice.

“I will come,” he said.

Annie led the way across the entry to the south parlor, which was the ordinary sitting-room of the family in winter weather, where the great hearth fire was kept, being raked over with ashes every night, and readily kindled anew every morning. Annie pulled a rocking-chair before the hearth.

“Please be seated, sir,” she said, “and I will soon have the fire burning.”

But as she went down on her knees upon the hearth the man pushed her gently aside and took the shovel from her hand.

“Nay, be seated yourself,” he said: “this is no work for your hands.”

“Oh, sir, I fear you are not able.”

Harry Carew laughed faintly and confusedly, and went on with his work of raking away the ashes from the bed of glowing coals. Annie lighted the candles, and he piled some sticks on the fire, which soon blazed. The room was full of light, and Annie looked timidly at her guest. He was very white, so white that she was confirmed in her opinion that he must be exhausted by his struggle with the storm; and, moreover, his face wore a strange expression, half of reckless mirth, and half of something else

which she could not decipher.

However, his face, now seen fully, was very handsome and quite young. He had tossed his slouched hat aside and displayed his head of black curly locks. His clothes, though they were rough and sat upon him somewhat carelessly, had yet the air of a gentleman's. His short cloak, thrown back over his shoulders, disclosed a pistol in his belt, which was a common enough ornament for a gentleman travelling alone on horseback, and Annie thought nothing of it.

The young man, on his part, saw for the first time — for he had not fully seen her that evening — the very loveliest maid his eyes had ever beheld. She was clad in a sack and petticoat of crimson wool, of which the fire-light and the candle-light made a rich flow of color, and her face was surrounded by the loose stream of her brown hair. Of such an exceeding fineness and delicacy was Annie's beauty that it had an unreal character, and led a beholder to doubt if he saw aright. The face of the young man surveying her became more and more singular in expression. He had a feeling as if a draught of wine had gone to his head, and he did not fairly know if he were in his sober senses or not.

"I am sorry that I was so long in coming to admit you," she said again, with sweetest apology. "I saw you from my window, and as soon as I could went down to unbolt the door, but you were not there. I am sorry that you had to climb in the window."

Mr. Harry Carew colored like a girl; he began to speak, and stammered, then laughed nervously to hide his confusion.

"I should have begged you to come home with me this evening, perhaps," said Annie, with a sweet and childlike directness, though she was evidently stirred with maidenly modesty and embarrassment. "My sister Cornelia would have made you welcome, and — and — I knew, of course, who you

were.”

“What the devil can she mean?” thought Harry Carew, then checked even his reckless mode of thought before the tender innocence in her face.

“I am very sorry I did not,” Annie continued, almost tearfully, feeling more and more distressed at her lack of courtesy. “I knew the storm was coming fast, too. It is dreadful that you wandered about so long.”

“Oh, do not think of that, I beg of you,” returned Harry Carew, in a choked voice.

“Please be seated,” urged Annie, sweetly.

“No, no; thank you,” he stammered out. “You — you are an angel. I never saw mortal woman like you. But I cannot stay. I must be back in Boston before to-morrow morning.”

He reached towards his hat, then turning, saw Annie regarding him with a look of such utter alarm and wonder that he started. Then with a gesture of the very helplessness of recklessness he sat down in the chair which she had placed for him. “Well,” he said, with something between a laugh and a groan, “I will stay, and thank you for your hospitality, as I would thank an angel at the gate of heaven. But call your sister, child, for 'tis after midnight, and she does not know me as well as you do, for there cannot be two such miracles of trust and innocence under one roof.”

Annie turned towards the door, but it was opened before she reached it, and Cornelia stood there, pale and stern and frightened, with old Deborah's nightcapped face peering around her shoulder.

Cornelia advanced into the room and stood staring, her head turning as with measured method, first towards her sister, then towards Carew, then

back again. Her eyes were full of dismay and incredulity.

“Oh, sister —” Annie began, but Cornelia did not seem to hear her; her head was turned towards the young man, and him she addressed.

“Who are you? Why do you come here at dead of night in such fashion as this?” she asked, and her voice had the awful sternness of aroused gentleness. There was no lack of spirit in Cornelia Pryor, especially when she had her young sister to defend.

The young man, who had arisen at her entrance, opened his mouth to speak, but Annie anticipated him.

“Oh, Cornelia!” she cried out in a grieving voice, as if she would burst into tears. “Oh, sister, do not speak to him so! The poor gentleman is overtaken by the storm on his way to Boston, and he is almost exhausted; see how pale he is. Oh, sister!”

“Is this true, sir?” demanded Cornelia, with keen eyes on his face.

The young man bowed. “It is true that I am overtaken by the storm, and I begin to doubt the possibility of my getting through to-night; the snow has gathered fast, and my horse is somewhat jaded. She has carried me from the south shore this afternoon.”

“Where is your horse, sir?”

“Tied to the gate yonder, madam.”

“Did you knock? I did not hear you.”

Then Annie interposed, with her eagerness like that of a child. “No, sister, he did not knock. I heard him coming, and I looked out of the window and

saw him in the yard, and I —”

“Why did you not call me?”

“Oh, sister, I was afraid that he would fall down out there in the storm before he would be let in. I thought you might be frightened because we were all alone and there were the silver and mother's jewels in the house, and — and you did not know him.”

“Do you know him?” asked poor Cornelia Pryor, with a gasp.

“Yes, sister,” replied Annie, blushing, but looking bravely at Cornelia.

“What is your name?” asked Cornelia, turning to the young man. Her lips were stiff: she could scarcely speak.

“Harry Carew, madam.”

“What is your native place?”

“Boston, madam.”

“Are you a relative of General Carew?”

The young man's mouth twitched and his forehead contracted. He looked whiter than ever, but he answered, presently, “I am his youngest son, madam.”

A quick light of recollection flashed over Cornelia's face. “Oh,” she said, involuntarily, “you are the son of whom I —”

But Harry Carew stopped her with a gesture of almost agony. “Oh, madam,” he cried out, as if he were in an extremity of peril — “oh, madam,

I beg of you to be silent! I beg of you to wait until I have had an opportunity to speak with you in private! I beg of you, by your womanly pity!"

Cornelia's face softened. "I have my sister to protect, sir," said she.

"And I will defend your sister with my life against any who offer her harm or insult, be he myself or any other man!" cried Harry Carew, hotly.

"Oh, sister!" said Annie.

Cornelia drew herself up to her full height. "Mr. Carew," said she, "we are a household of women, utterly helpless and unprotected. You are a stranger to me personally, though you claim to belong to a family whom I have known in times past; and it may be so, for you resemble General Carew, as I remember him, but I have no proof."

"Oh, sister!"

The young man pulled a letter from his pocket and handed it to Cornelia. "There is a letter received from my father not three days since," he said, "if that will serve as proof of my identity. I should have no object in coming by such a letter by unfair means, for it is of no value, since the golden words which it contains do not pass as coin of the realm."

Cornelia looked at the superscription on the great folded sheet.

"You are at liberty to read the contents," said the young man. "I beg that you will do so at your leisure."

Cornelia regarded him steadfastly, with the letter in her hand. "Admitting that you are Harry Carew," said she, "there are still grave reasons why I should hesitate about admitting you into such a household as this at such an hour, but I cannot drive you from my door in this storm, and I therefore

bid you welcome to a house which has never yet had its hospitality outraged or betrayed."

"And it shall never have it outraged or betrayed by me, madam," replied Harry Carew.

"Oh, sister!" Annie sighed, faintly.

"Deborah will fetch you the lantern and the keys," said Cornelia, "and you had best lead your horse to the barn and feed him. Then, when you return, you shall have some refreshment."

"Oh, madam," cried the young man, eagerly, "I want no supper for myself, only for my horse! If you will but give me a bed and shelter, it is all I ask."

"We send not our guests to bed supperless," replied Cornelia, with her mild stateliness of manner.

Mr. Harry Carew took the lantern and keys as directed, and when he had stabled and fed his jaded horse, had his own supper, served daintily with fine damask and all the silver tea things, and then went to bed in the bedstead of state in the guest-chamber of the Pryor house.

That was the great snow-storm, which became the folk-lore tale of a generation. Once in a while a storm of the elements, like a storm of human passion, rages itself into immortality. The snow fell during two nights and the greater part of three days, and all the roads were impassable. Harry Carew remained in the Pryor house nearly all the week, otherwise he had stood a fair chance of perishing by the way. All the landmarks of stones and fences were lost, the trees stood branch-high in windward swirls, and the houses, with shaggy walls and pendulous eaves, like old men's beards, cowered low under great weights of snow.

Harry Carew worked manfully, fighting the snow with shovel and broom, defending the house of his entertainers as best he might against the onslaught of the storm. Several times the great chimney had to be dug out, since its cap of snow extinguished the hearth fire, and the house was thereby filled with smoke. The blinds and shutters of the northeast windows had to be braced, else the windows would have been forced in with the battering gusts of the storm.

"Only see how hard he is working for us, sister," said Annie, with soft reproach, "and you hesitated about asking him to stay, though he would have perished in the storm."

"I was only fearful for you, love," replied Cornelia, in a troubled voice. Cornelia was very pale; she seemed to have grown thin in a few days.

"Well, you are not now; you have seen his letters, and you know there is not such a man anywhere. I am not sure that even father was as good as he is," said Annie, radiantly.

The morning after Harry Carew's arrival Annie had gone to Cornelia with her precious letters.

"What are they?" Cornelia asked, faintly, when she held them out towards her. She made no motion to take them.

"The letters he sent — the letters he wrote."

"The letters who wrote?" Cornelia spoke as if her voice were failing her.

"The letters that Mr. Harry Carew wrote," replied Annie, blushing, and looking at her with surprise. "Who else could have written them?"

"Take them away," said Cornelia, thrusting at the letters with her slim,

trembling hand.

"Why, no, sister. I want you to read them; then you will see how good and noble he is," Annie said, in a hurt fashion.

"No, dear; I would rather not read them."

"Oh, sister!" pleaded Annie, in her little sweet voice, which had always won the elder sister from her own way. Cornelia took the letters, and the red surged over her thin face, and her hands shook as she opened them till the paper rustled like leaves in a wind.

Annie waited; then she confronted Cornelia with a look of triumph. "He wrote them, sister," she said, then started, her sister's face was so strange and ghastly, and so laboring with speech which yet did not come. "Why, what is it? what is it, sister?" she cried out. "Are you ill? Oh, sister!"

Cornelia motioned her away, trying to smile.

"Sister, are you ill?"

"No, no, love. Go now; take your letters and go. I want to think."

"You are not ill?"

"No, I tell you, love."

"Oh, sister, was there ever anybody like him? And you are not angry because I did not tell you before about the letters?"

"No, love," said Cornelia, patiently; but she did not look at Annie.

"I will never keep anything from you again, sister. You will not mistrust him

ever again, now you have seen his beautiful letters, will you, sister?"

"No, love," Cornelia repeated: she was breathing shortly, as if she had been running.

"Shall I tell her? Shall I tell her?" she kept asking herself; but she told nothing, and Annie went away with her letters, rather puzzled and hurt by her sister's manner, but not seriously so. This young girl was cast on very simple lines, and with the lack of subtlety in her own nature came the lack of comprehension of it in others. She would always see the characters of her fellow-beings like pure colors, with no complexities of shadings and motives, and no amount of jostling by life would ever depose her from the first ground of observation from which her childish eyes had beheld the world and the things thereof.

She went away with her letters, and there was Harry Carew standing in the door of the south parlor, bowing low, and accosting her as if she were indeed an angel, as he had said, and with all the little savor of gentle mockery and merriment gone from his manner.

"Oh, believe me, I do not know how to express to you my gratitude, my more than gratitude, my heart-felt devotion, for the confidence which you place in me and the permission which you and your sister give me to remain," he said, fervently, with eyes of reverent admiration on her face.

Annie laughed gently. There was a soft blush all over her sweet face, which seemed to the young man like a tangible veil of maiden modesty which separated her from him. "Oh, sir," she replied, "it requires no trust after these letters! They bear testimony to what you are."

"Those letters?"

"Yes, sir. Have you so soon forgotten your own letters?" Annie laughed

again, though in a puzzled fashion.

“My letters?”

“Yes, sir, your letters.” Annie's face, surveying his, began to look grieved as well as puzzled, and she straightened herself a little at the same time.

Harry Carew extended his hand. “Since you say they are mine, may I see them?” he asked, almost timidly.

But Annie held the letters with a quick motion close to her bosom, and looked at him with a deepening blush on her cheeks.

“As you please. I would not look at them against your will,” Harry Carew said, gently and humbly.

“You may see them,” Annie said, in a whisper. Then she gave him the letters, and stood with her head averted while he looked at them, lest he read certain passages at the same moment when she should remember them.

Harry Carew unfolded the letters with trembling hands and glanced over them. His face changed as he read. “Who is this man, this friend of yours, who calls himself David Amicus?” he asked, abruptly.

Annie was cruelly bewildered at the question. She did not know if she should be hurt or indignant. She did not answer at once, but glanced at him irresolutely.

“Well?” asked Harry Carew, harshly.

“Why, sir, you yourself! It is scarcely kind or courteous of you to make a jest of me,” said Annie then, with something of dignity.

Harry Carew drew a long breath. "Believe me, I have no thought of making a jest of you," he said, earnestly. "I crave your pardon if I have seemed to do so. But tell me the whole story, if you please. How long have you been receiving these letters? How did they come?"

"But you already know, sir."

"But tell me over. I beg of you."

Then Annie half reluctantly, for she was still doubtful as to whether or not he was making a jest of her, told him the story of the letters.

When she had finished she scarcely knew Harry Carew's face, that she had seen it before, so softened it was, and full of sorrow and shame and tenderness. It seemed to her, also, that his black eyes were bright with tears; but that she doubted, since he was a man, and she knew of no reason for them.

Harry Carew gave the letters to her. "Thank you," he said, and bowed, and went abruptly, turning his face aside like a girl, as if he wished to conceal it, into the south room, in whose door he had been standing.

Annie went away with her letters, somewhat puzzled and hurt by Mr. Harry Carew's manner, as she had been by Cornelia's, but never doubting anything. She reflected that he had probably some good reason for pretending surprise concerning the letters, as he had had for secrecy in the first place.

Later in the day Harry Carew and Cornelia Pryor had a private conference in the north parlor, whither she had led the way, that they might be secure from interruption. There was no fire in the room, and the white storm drove past its four windows, filling it with a pale gloom. Cornelia stood in the

midst of the great square apartment, confronting her guest with a mild pitilessness. "I found a window in this room open last night, Mr. Carew," she said. "I continue to offer you my hospitality, but it is best that we understand each other. Why did you come to this house last night?"

"I came to rob you, to steal your money and your jewels," answered Harry Carew, looking at her with face as white as if he were dead. Then suddenly, before she could speak, he had thrown himself on his knees before her. "Oh," he cried, "I beg of you never to let her know! I beg of you never to let your sister know! If you do, you will have snatched away the last straw that could save me from destruction."

"Your poor father, whose letter I have read, should save you from destruction, and not my sister," answered Cornelia, coldly.

"Oh," said Harry Carew, hoarsely, "I have read those letters, and I know what she thinks of me. For God's sake, never tell her what I am! Never let me see myself in her eyes as black as I am, lest I can never be anything else forever. Oh, I beg of you never to tell her that those letters are not mine!"

"Would you then deceive her, and add treachery to your other sins?" Cornelia asked, sternly.

"No, no; I would make those letters true. I would grow to be what she thinks I am. I would reach the height on which I see myself in her innocent heart. Oh, I beg of you do not take away my last chance of salvation! Let me work and strive until I have made myself worthy of her."

"You have not known my sister one day," said Cornelia, coldly.

"How long does it take to learn to love an angel?" demanded Harry Carew. Suddenly a look of jealous anxiety came over his face. "Who wrote those

letters?" he asked. "I thought, when I read them, that no man wrote them, for I never knew a man so good; but if any did, he has first right."

"I wrote them," said Cornelia.

"You?"

There was something fairly majestic about Cornelia Pryor, standing before him in her long black gown, which shaded as unsubstantially into the gloom of the room as a shadow. "I had in my youth a bitter experience," said she. "I discovered the treachery and wickedness of man. I threw my heart away upon one who was unworthy, and I wanted to save my sister from a like fate. I wanted to fill her mind with such a pure ideal that there could be no danger. I endeavored in those letters to show what a man worthy of her affection should be, that she might love no other."

Cornelia Pryor disclosed her visionary and romantic scheme with a quiet stateliness and dignity which challenged criticism. Harry Carew stared at her incredulously, then he almost laughed, though the tears stood in his bold black eyes. "And then — and then," he stammered, "I came with the husks in my heart and my stomach, and she invested me with all those virtues. She greeted me, coming to rob her, as if I were the prince."

Harry Carew's face took on an expression of the most passionate devotion; his voice broke. "Bless her! bless her!" he said. "I will worship her for that till my dying day, if I can have no more.

"It is the first time I ever attempted to steal," he added, eagerly. "I hope you will believe that. Last night I was well-nigh desperate. I had lost every cent at cards. I determined to rob the Boston stage. Then she came and saved me from that. I would have dropped dead first then.

"Then I had not a cent in my purse, and the storm came on. I did not know

that she lived here; I thought she went to the house beyond. I have never attempted highway robbery or burglary before. I trust you will believe that. I beg you never to let her know what I came here for last night, as you hope for mercy. Let me have my chance to reach what she thinks I am; then I will tell her all myself."

Harry Carew went away nearly a week later. He saw Annie alone in the north parlor a few minutes before he left, but there were no words of love passed between them. He only held both her little hands in his, and looked in her eyes as if they had been indeed those of an angel, and who can say what angel of himself poor Harry Carew saw there?

"Good-bye," he said, "and he shall come back to you some day."

"Who shall come back?" asked Annie, wonderingly, and trembled under his eyes, which had meanings besides love which she could not fathom.

"The man who wrote the letters," replied Harry Carew. Then he kissed her hands and was gone.

It was two years before Harry Carew returned, and then in far different fashion from that in which he had come before. His father and mother were with him, and they all rode in the great Carew coach; and Harry had arrived at that fair after-estate of the prodigal son, and no question of his abiding. He was arrayed in purple and fine linen; he held his head high, and looked abroad like one who sees things as they are from the unwavering foothold of his own self-respect. Harry had just been elected to a high office in the city government of Boston. People opined that he would yet be the most prosperous of the Carews.

Then Annie Pryor and Harry Carew were married and went away, and the

evening after they were gone Cornelia strolled out to the turnpike, and then a little farther to the old elm, the "Tree of Knowledge," as the people called it. It was a clear December night; there was no snow on the ground, and the sun was setting redly. The limbs of the tree, with their mottle of gray lichen, reflected orange tints of flame, and looked like mottled orange snakes uprearing in triangular contortions against the sky. Cornelia stood under them, reflecting. She called to mind everything which had passed — about the letters, and Annie's love and wooing and wedding — and she wondered if it might not sometimes be better to guard the Tree of Knowledge with the flaming sword, instead of the gates of a lost Paradise.

Cornelia wondered, standing under the tree, clad still in the dress of splendid brocade which she had worn at Annie's wedding: there were gold and silver threads in it. The sun sank, and the orange light on the tree paled. Cornelia gazed down the darkening curve of road. Annie was wedded and gone, all her own romance was dead, and she was left alone; yet her peace did not fail her, nor her anticipation of joy to come, for she had thrust herself and her own needs and sorrows so far behind her trimmed and burning lamp of love that she had become, as it were, a wedding-guest of all life.

ENGLAND TO AMERICA, by Margaret Prescott Montague

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I.

"Lord, but English people are funny!"

This was the perplexed mental ejaculation that young Lieutenant Skipworth Cary, of Virginia, found his thoughts constantly reiterating during his stay in Devonshire. Had he been, he wondered, a confiding fool, to accept so trustingly Chev Sherwood's suggestion that he spend a part of his leave, at least, at Bishopsthorpe, where Chev's people lived? But why should he have anticipated any difficulty here, in this very corner of England which had bred his own ancestors, when he had always hit it off so splendidly with his English comrades at the Front? Here, however, though they were all awfully kind,--at least, he was sure they meant to be kind,--something was always bringing him up short: something that he could not lay hold of, but which made him feel like a blind man groping in a strange place, or worse, like a bull in a china-shop. He was prepared enough to find differences in the American and English points of view. But this thing that baffled him did not seem to have to do with that; it was something deeper, something very definite, he was sure--and yet, what was it? The worst of it was that he had a curious feeling as if they were all--that is, Lady Sherwood and Gerald; not Sir Charles so much--protecting him from himself--keeping him from making breaks, as he phrased it. That hurt and annoyed him, and piqued his vanity. Was he a social blunderer, and weren't a Virginia gentleman's manners to be trusted in England without leading-strings? He had been at the Front for several months with the Royal Flying Corps, and when his leave came, his Flight Commander, Captain Cheviot Sherwood, discovering that he meant to spend it in England, where he

hardly knew a soul, had said his people down in Devonshire would be jolly glad to have him stop with them; and Skipworth Cary, knowing that, if the circumstances had been reversed, his people down in Virginia would indeed have been jolly glad to entertain Captain Sherwood, had accepted unhesitatingly. The invitation had been seconded by a letter from Lady Sherwood,--Chev's mother,--and after a few days sight-seeing in London, he had come down to Bishopsthorpe, very eager to know his friend's family, feeling as he did about Chev himself. "He's the finest man that ever went up in the air," he had written home; and to his own family's disgust, his letters had been far more full of Chev Sherwood than they had been of Skipworth Cary.

And now here he was, and he almost wished himself away--wished almost that he was back again at the Front, carrying on under Chev. There, at least, you knew what you were up against. The job might be hard enough, but it wasn't baffling and queer, with hidden undercurrents that you couldn't chart. It seemed to him that this baffling feeling of constraint had rushed to meet him on the very threshold of the drawing-room, when he made his first appearance.

As he entered, he had a sudden sensation that they had been awaiting him in a strained expectancy, and that, as he appeared, they adjusted unseen masks and began to play-act at something. "But English people don't play-act very well," he commented to himself, reviewing the scene afterward.

Lady Sherwood had come forward and greeted him in a manner which would have been pleasant enough, if he had not, with quick sensitiveness, felt it to be forced. But perhaps that was English stiffness.

Then she had turned to her husband, who was standing staring into the fireplace, although, as it was June, there was no fire there to stare

at.

"Charles," she said, "here is Lieutenant Cary"; and her voice had a certain note in it which at home Cary and his sister Nancy were in the habit of designating "mother-making-dad-mind-his-manners."

At her words the old man--and Cary was startled to see how old and broken he was--turned round and held out his hand, "How d'you do?" he said jerkily, "how d'you do?" and then turned abruptly back again to the fireplace.

"Hello! What's up! The old boy doesn't like me!" was Cary's quick, startled comment to himself.

He was so surprised by the look the other bent upon him that he involuntarily glanced across to a long mirror to see if there was anything wrong with his uniform. But no, that appeared to be all right. It was himself, then--or his country; perhaps the old sport didn't fall for Americans.

"And here is Gerald," Lady Sherwood went on in her low remote voice, which somehow made the Virginian feel very far away.

It was with genuine pleasure, though with some surprise, that he turned to greet Gerald Sherwood, Chev's younger brother, who had been, tradition in the corps said, as gallant and daring a flyer as Chev himself, until he got his in the face five months ago.

"I'm mighty glad to meet you," he said eagerly, in his pleasant, muffled Southern voice, grasping the hand the other stretched out, and looking with deep respect at the scarred face and sightless eyes.

Gerald laughed a little, but it was a pleasant laugh, and his hand-clasp

was friendly.

"That's real American, isn't it?" he said. "I ought to have remembered and said it first. Sorry."

Skipworth laughed too. "Well," he conceded, "we generally are glad to meet people in my country, and we don't care who says it first. But," he added. "I didn't think I'd have the luck to find you here."

He remembered that Chev had regretted that he probably wouldn't see Gerald, as the latter was at St. Dunstan's, where they were re-educating the blinded soldiers.

The other hesitated a moment, and then said rather awkwardly, "Oh, I'm just home for a little while; I only got here this morning, in fact."

Skipworth note the hesitation. Did the old people get panicky at the thought of entertaining a wild man from Virginia, and send an SOS for Gerald, he wondered.

"We are so glad you could come to us," Lady Sherwood said rather hastily just then. And again he could not fail to note that she was prompting her husband.

The latter reluctantly turned round, and said, "Yes, yes, quite so. Welcome to Bishopsthorpe, my boy," as if his wife had pulled a string, and he responded mechanically, without quite knowing what he said. Then, as his eyes rested a moment on his guest, he looked as if he would like to bolt out of the room. He controlled himself, however, and, jerking round again to the fireplace, went on murmuring, "Yes, yes, yes," vaguely--just like the dormouse at the Mad Tea-Party, who went to sleep, saying, "Twinkle, twinkle, twinkle," Cary could not help thinking to himself.

But after all, it wasn't really funny, it was pathetic. Gosh, how doddering the poor old boy was! Skipworth wondered, with a sudden twist at his heart, if the war was playing the deuce with his home people, too. Was his own father going to pieces like this, and had his mother's gay vivacity fallen into that still remoteness of Lady Sherwood's? But of course not! The Carys hadn't suffered as the poor Sherwoods had, with their youngest son, Curtin, killed early in the war, and now Gerald knocked out so tragically. Lord, he thought, how they must all bank on Chev! And of course they would want to hear at once about him. "I left Chev as fit as anything, and he sent all sorts of messages," he reported, thinking it more discreet to deliver Chev's messages thus vaguely than to repeat his actual carefree remark, which had been, "Oh, tell 'em I'm jolly as a tick."

But evidently there was something wrong with the words as they were, for instantly he was aware of that curious sense of withdrawal on their part. Hastily reviewing them, he decided that they had sounded too familiar from a stranger and a younger man like himself. He supposed he ought not to have spoken of Chev by his first name. Gee, what sticklers they were! Wouldn't his family--dad and mother and Nancy--have fairly lapped up any messages from him, even if they had been delivered a bit awkwardly? However, he added, as a concession to their point of view, "But of course, you'll have had later news of Captain Sherwood."

To which, after a pause, Lady Sherwood responded, "Oh, yes," in that remote and colourless voice which might have meant anything or nothing.

At this point dinner was announced.

Lady Sherwood drew her husband away from the empty fireplace, and Gerald slipped his arm through the Virginian's, saying pleasantly, "I'm

learning to carry on fairly well at St. Dunstan's, but I confess I still like to have a pilot."

To look at the tall young fellow beside him, whose scarred face was so reminiscent of Chev's untouched good looks, who had known all the immense freedom of the air, but who was now learning to carry on in the dark, moved Skipworth Cary to generous homage.

"You know my saying I'm glad to meet you isn't just American," he said half shyly, but warmly. "It's plain English, and the straight truth. I've wanted to meet you awfully. The oldsters are always holding up your glorious exploits to us newcomers. Withers never gets tired telling about that fight of yours with the four enemy planes. And besides," he rushed on eagerly, "I'm glad to have a chance to tell Chev's brother--Captain Sherwood's brother, I mean--what I think of him. Only as a matter of fact, I can't," he broke off with a laugh. "I can't put it exactly into words, but I tell you I'd follow that man straight into hell and out the other side--or go there alone if he told me to. He is the finest chap that ever flew."

And then he felt as if a cold douche had been flung in his face, for after a moment's pause, the other returned, "That's awfully good of you," in a voice so distant and formal that the Virginian could have kicked himself. What an ass he was to be so darned enthusiastic with an Englishman! He supposed it was bad form to show any pleasure over praise

of a member of your family. Lord, if Chev got the V.C., he reckoned it would be awful to speak of it. Still, you would have thought Gerald might have stood for a little praise of him. But then, glancing sideways at his companion, he surprised on his face a look so strange and suffering that it came to him almost violently what it must be never to fly again; to be on the threshold of life, with endless days of blackness ahead. Good God! How cruel he had been to flaunt Chev in his

face! In remorseful and hasty reparation he stumbled on. "But the old fellows are always having great discussions as to which was the best--you or your brother. Withers always maintains you were."

"Withers lies, then!" the other retorted. "I never touched Chev--never came within a mile of him, and never could have."

They reached the dinner-table with that, and young Cary found himself bewildered and uncomfortable. If Gerald hadn't liked praise of Chev, he had liked praise of himself even less, it seemed.

Dinner was not a success. The Virginian found that, if there was to be conversation, the burden of carrying it on was upon him, and gosh! they don't mind silences in this man's island, do they? he commented desperately to himself, thinking how different it was from America. Why, there they acted as if silence was an egg that had just been laid, and everyone had to cackle at once to cover it up. But here the talk constantly fell to the ground, and nobody but himself seemed concerned to pick it up. His attempt to praise Chev had not been successful, and he could understand their not wanting to hear about flying and the war before Gerald.

So at last, in desperation, he wandered off into descriptions of America, finding to his relief, that he had struck the right note at last. They were glad to hear about the States, and Lady Sherwood inquired politely if the Indians still gave them much trouble; and when he assured her that in Virginia, except for the Pocahontas tribe, they were all pretty well subdued, she accepted his statement with complete innocence. And he was so delighted to find at last a subject to which they were evidently cordial, that he was quite carried away, and would up by inviting them all to visit his family in Richmond, as soon as soon as the war was over.

Gerald accepted at once, with enthusiasm; Lady Sherwood made polite murmurs, smiling at him in quite a warm and almost, indeed, maternal manner. Even Sir Charles, who had been staring at the food on his plate as if he did not quite know what to make of it, came to the surface long enough to mumble, "Yes, yes, very good idea. Countries must carry on together--What?"

But that was the only hit of the whole evening, and when the Virginian retired to his room, as he made an excuse to do early, he was so confused and depressed that he fell into an acute attack of homesickness.

Heavens, he thought, as he tumbled into bed, just suppose, now, this was little old Richmond, Virginia, U.S.A., instead of being Bishopsthorpe, Avery Cross near Wick, and all the rest of it! And at that, he grinned to himself. England wasn't such an all-fired big country that you'd think they'd have to ticket themselves with addresses a yard long, for fear they'd get lost--now, would you? Well, anyway, suppose it was Richmond, and his train just pulling into the Byrd Street Station. He stretched out luxuriously, and let his mind picture the whole familiar scene. The wind was blowing right, so there was the mellow homely smell of tobacco in the streets, and plenty of people all along the way to hail him with outstretched hands and shouts of "Hey, Skip Cary, when did you get back?" "Welcome home, my boy!" "Well, will you _look_ what the cat dragged in!" And so he came to his own front door-step, and, walking straight in, surprised the whole family at breakfast; and yes--doggone it! if it wasn't Sunday, and they having waffles! And after that his obliging fancy bore him up Franklin Street, through Monroe Park, and so to Miss Sally Berkeley's door. He was sound asleep before he reached it, but in his dreams, light as a little bird, she came flying down the broad stairway to meet him, and--

But when he waked next morning, he did not find himself in Virginia,

but in Devonshire, where, to his unbounded embarrassment, a white housemaid was putting up his curtains and whispering something about his bath. And though he pretended profound slumber, he was well aware that people do not turn brick-red in their sleep. And the problem of what was the matter with the Sherwood family was still before him.

II

"They're playing a game," he told himself after a few days. "That is, Lady Sherwood and Gerald are--poor old Sir Charles can't make much of a stab at it. The game is to make me think they are awfully glad to have me, when in reality there's something about me, or something I do, that gets them on the raw."

He almost decided to make some excuse and get away; but after all, that was not easy. In English novels, he remembered, they always had a wire calling them to London; but, darn it all! the Sherwoods knew mighty well there wasn't any one in London who cared a hoot about him.

The thing that got his goat most, he told himself, was that they apparently didn't like his friendship with Chev. Anyway they didn't seem to want him to talk about him; and whenever he tried to express his warm appreciation for all that the older man had done for him, he was instantly aware of a wall of reserve on their part, a holding of themselves aloof from him. That puzzled and hurt him, and put him on his dignity. He concluded that they thought it was cheeky of a youngster like him to think that a man like Chev could be his friend; and if that was the way they felt, he reckoned he'd jolly well better shut up about it.

But whatever it was that they didn't like about him, they most certainly did want him to have a good time. He and his pleasure appeared to be for

the time being their chief consideration. And after the first day or so he began indeed to enjoy himself extremely. For one thing, he came to love the atmosphere of the old place and of the surrounding country, which he and Gerald explored together. He liked to think that ancestors of his own had been inheritors of these green lanes, and pleasant mellow stretches. Then, too, after the first few days, he could not help seeing that they really began to like him, which of course was reassuring, and tapped his own warm friendliness, which was always ready enough to be released. And besides, he got by accident what he took to be a hint as to the trouble. He was passing the half-open door of Lady Sherwood's morning-room, when he heard Sir Charles's voice break out, "Good God, Elizabeth, I don't see how you stand it! When I see him so straight and fine-looking, and so untouched, beside our poor lad, and think--and think--"

Skipworth hurried out of earshot, but now he understood that look of aversion in the old man's eyes which had so startled him at first. Of course, the poor old boy might easily hate the sight of him beside Gerald. With Gerald himself he really got along famously. He was a most delightful companion, full of anecdotes and history of the countryside, every foot of which he had apparently explored in the old days with Chev and the younger brother, Curtin. Yet even with Gerald, Cary sometimes felt that aloofness and reserve, and that older protective air that they all showed him. Take, for instance, that afternoon when they were lolling together on the grass in the park. The Virginian, running on in his usual eager manner, had plunged without thinking into an account of a particularly daring bit of flying on Chev's part, when suddenly he realized that Gerald had rolled over on the grass and buried his face in his arms, and interrupted himself awkwardly. "But, of course," he said, "he must have written home about it himself."

"No, or if he did, I didn't hear of it. Go on," Gerald said in a muffled voice.

A great rush of compassion and remorse overwhelmed the Virginian, and he

burst out penitently, "What a brute I am! I'm always forgetting and running on about flying, when I know it must hurt like the very devil!"

The other drew a difficult breath. "Yes," he admitted, "what you say does hurt in a way--in a way you can't understand. But all the same I like to hear you. Go on about Chev."

So Skipworth went on and finished his account, winding up, "I don't believe there's another man in the service who could have pulled it off--but I tell you your brother's one in a million."

"Good God, don't I know it!" the other burst out. "We were all three the jolliest pals together," he got out presently in a choked voice, "Chev and the young un and I; and now--"

He did not finish, but Cary guessed his meaning. Now the young un, Curtin, was dead, and Gerald himself knocked out. But, heavens! the Virginian though, did Gerald think Chev would go back on him now on account of his blindness? Well, you could everlastingly bet he wouldn't!

"Chev thinks the world and all of you!" he cried in eager defense of his friend's loyalty. "Lots of times when we're all awfully jolly together, he makes some excuse and goes off by himself; and Withers told me it was because he was so frightfully cut up about you. Withers said he told him once that he'd a lot rather have got it himself--so you can everlastingly bank on him!"

Gerald gave a terrible little gasp. "I--I knew he'd feel like that," he got out. "We've always cared such a lot for each other." And then he

pressed his face harder than ever into the grass, and his long body quivered all over. But not for long. In a moment he took fierce hold on himself, muttering, "Well, one must carry on, whatever happens," and apologized disjointedly. "What a fearful fool you must think me! And--and this isn't very pippy for you, old chap." Presently, after that, he sat up, and said, brushing it all aside, "We're facing the old moat, aren't we? There's an interesting bit of tradition about it that I must tell you."

And there you were, Cary thought: no matter how much Gerald might be suffering from his misfortune, he must carry on just the same, and see that his visitor had a pleasant time. It made the Virginian feel like an outsider and very young as if he were not old enough for them to show him their real feelings.

Another thing that he noticed was that they did not seem to want him to meet people. They never took him anywhere to call and if visitors came to the house, they showed an almost panicky desire to get him out of the way. That again hurt his pride. What in heaven's name was the matter with him anyway!

III

However on the last afternoon of his stay at Bishopsthorpe, he told himself with a rather rueful grin, that his manners must have improved a little, for they took him to tea at the rectory.

He was particularly glad to go there because, from certain jokes of Withers's, who had known the Sherwoods since boyhood, he gathered that Chev and the rector's daughter were engaged. And just as he would have liked Chev to meet Sally Berkeley, so he wanted to meet Miss Sybil Gaylord.

He had little hope of having a tête-à-tête with her, but as it fell out he did. They were all in the rectory garden together, Gerald and the rector a little behind Miss Gaylord and himself, as they strolled down a long walk with high hedges bordering it. On the other side of the hedge Lady Sherwood and her hostess still sat at the tea-table, and then it was that Cary heard Mrs. Gaylord say distinctly, "I'm afraid the strain has been too much for you--you should have let us have him."

To which Lady Sherwood returned quickly. "Oh, no, that would have been impossible with--"

"Come--come this way--I must show you the view from the arbor," Miss Gaylord broke in breathlessly; and laying a hand on his arm, she turned abruptly into a side path.

Glancing down at her the Southerner could not but note the panic and distress in her fair face. It was so obvious that the overheard words referred to him, and he was so bewildered by the whole situation that he burst out impulsively, "I say, what is the matter with me? Why do they find me so hard to put up with? Is it something I do--or don't they like Americans? Honestly, I wish you'd tell me."

She stood still at that, looking at him, her blue eyes full of distress and concern.

"Oh, I am so sorry," she cried. "They would be so sorry to have you think anything like that."

"But what is it?" her persisted. "Don't they like Americans?"

"Oh, no, it isn't like that--Oh, quite the contrary!" she returned eagerly.

"Then it's something about me they don't like?"

"Oh, no, no! Least of all, that--_don't_ think that!" she begged.

"But what am I to think then?"

"Don't think anything just yet," she pleaded. "Wait a little, and you will understand."

She was so evidently distressed that he could not press her further; and fearing she might think him unappreciative, he said, "Well, whatever it is, it hasn't prevented me from having a ripping good time. They've seen to that, and just done everything for my pleasure."

She looked up quickly, and to his relief he saw that for once he had said the right thing.

"You enjoyed it, then?" she questioned eagerly.

"Most awfully," he assured her warmly. "I shall always remember what a happy leave they gave me."

She gave a little sigh of satisfaction, "I am so glad," she said. "They wanted you to have a good time--that was what we all wanted."

He looked at her gratefully, thinking how sweet she was in her fair English beauty, and how good to care that he should have enjoyed his leave. How different she was too from Sally Berkeley--why she would have made two of his little girl! And how quiet! Sally Berkeley, with her quick glancing vivacity, would have been all around her and off again like a humming-bird before she could have uttered two words. And yet he was sure that they would have been friends, just as he and Chev were.

Perhaps they all would be, after the war. And then he began to talk about Chev, being sure that, had the circumstances been reversed, Sally Berkeley would have wanted news of him. Instantly he was aware of a tense listening stillness on her part. That pleased him. Well, she did care for the old fellow all right, he thought; and though she made no response, averting her face and plucking nervously at the leaves of the hedge as they passed slowly along, he went on pouring out his eager admiration for his friend.

At last they came to a seat in an arbour, from which one looked out upon a green beneficent landscape. It was an intimate secluded little spot--and oh, if Sally Berkeley were only there to sit beside him! And as he thought of this, it came to him whimsically that in all probability she must be longing for Chev, just as he was for Sally.

Dropping down on the bench beside her, he leaned over, and said with a friendly, almost brotherly, grin of understanding, "I reckon you're wishing Captain Sherwood was sitting here, instead of Lieutenant Cary."

The minute the impulsive words were out of his mouth, he knew he had blundered, been awkward, and inexcusably intimate. She gave a little choked gasp, and her blue eyes stared up at him, wide and startled. Good heavens, what a break he had made! No wonder the Sherwoods couldn't trust him in company! There seemed no apology that he could offer in words, but at least, he thought, he would show her that he would not intrude on her secret without being willing to share his with her. With awkward haste he put his hand into his breast-pocket, and dragged forth the picture of Sally Berkeley he always carried there.

"This is the little girl I'm thinking about," he said, turning very red, yet boyishly determined to make amends, and also proudly confident of Sally Berkeley's charms. "I'd like mighty well for you two to know one another."

She took the picture in silence, and for a long moment stared down at the soft little face, so fearless, so confident and gay, that smiled appealingly back at her. Then she did something astonishing,--something which seemed to him wholly un-English,--and yet he thought it the sweetest thing he had ever seen. Cupping her strong hands about the picture with a quick protectiveness, she suddenly raised it to her lips, and kissed it lightly. "O little girl!" she cried. "I hope you will be very happy!"

The little involuntary act, so tender, so sisterly and spontaneous, touched the Virginian extremely.

"Thanks, awfully," he said unsteadily. "She'll think a lot of that, just as I do--and I know she'd wish you the same."

She made no reply to that, and as she handed the picture back to him, he saw that her hands were trembling, and he had a sudden conviction that, if she had been Sally Berkeley, her eyes would have been full of tears. As she was Sybil Gaylord, however, there were no tears there, only a look that he never forgot. The look of one much older, protective, maternal almost, and as if she were gazing back at Sally Berkeley and himself from a long way ahead on the road of life. He supposed it was the way most English people felt nowadays. He had surprised it so often on all their faces, that he could not help speaking of it.

"You all think we Americans are awfully young and raw, don't you?" he questioned.

"Oh, no, not that," she deprecated. "Young perhaps for these days, yes--but it is more that you--that your country is so--so unsuffered. And we don't want you to suffer!" she added quickly.

Yes, that was it! He understood now, and, heavens, how fine it was! Old England was wounded deep--deep. What she suffered herself she was too proud to show; but out of it she wrought a great maternal care for the newcomer. Yes, it _was_ fine--he hoped his country would understand.

Miss Gaylord rose. "There are Gerald and father looking for you," she said, "and I must go now." She held out her hand. "Thank you for letting me see her picture, and for everything you said about Captain Sherwood--for _everything_, remember--I want you to remember."

With a light pressure of her fingers she was gone, slipping away through the shrubbery, and he did not see her again.

IV

So he came to his last morning at Bishopsthorpe; and as he dressed, he wished it could have been different; that he were not still conscious of that baffling wall of reserve between himself and Chev's people, for whom, despite all, he had come to have a real affection.

In the breakfast-room he found them all assembled, and his last meal there seemed to him as constrained and difficult as any that had preceded it. It was over finally, however, and in a few minutes he would be leaving.

"I can never thank you enough for the splendid time I've had here," he said as he rose. "I'll be seeing Chev to-morrow, and I'll tell him all about everything."

Then he stopped dead. With a smothered exclamation, old Sir Charles had stumbled to his feet, knocking over his chair, and hurried blindly out of the room; and Gerald said, "_Mother_!" in a choked appeal.

As if it were a signal between them, Lady Sherwood pushed her chair back a little from the table, her long delicate fingers dropped together loosely in her lap; she gave a faint sigh as if a restraining mantle slipped from her shoulders, and, looking up at the youth before her, her fine pale face lighted with a kind of glory, she said, "No, dear lad, no. You can never tell Chev, for he is gone."

"_Gone_!" he cried.

"Yes," she nodded back at him, just above a whisper; and now her face quivered, and the tears began to rush down her cheeks.

"Not _dead_!" he cried. "Not Chev--not that! O my God, Gerald, not _that_!"

"Yes," Gerald said. "They got him two days after you left."

It was so overwhelming, so unexpected and shocking, above all so terrible, that the friend he had so greatly loved and admired was gone out of his life forever, that young Cary stumbled back into his seat, and, crumpling over, buried his face in his hands, making great uncouth gasps as he strove to choke back his grief.

Gerald groped hastily around the table, and flung an arm about his shoulders.

"Steady on, dear fellow, steady," he said, though his own voice broke.

"When did you hear?" Cary got out at last.

"We got the official notice just the day before you came--and Withers has written us particulars since."

"And you _let_ me come in spite of it! And stay on, when every word I said about him must have--have fairly _crucified_ each one of you! Oh, forgive me! forgive me!" he cried distractedly. He saw it all now; he understood at last. It was not on Gerald's account that they could not talk of flying and of Chev, it was because--because their hearts were broken over Chev himself. "Oh, forgive me!" he gasped again.

"Dear lad, there is nothing to forgive," Lady Sherwood returned. "How could we help loving your generous praise of our poor darling? We loved it, and you for it; we wanted to hear it, but we were afraid. We were afraid we might break down, and that you would find out."

The tears were still running down her cheeks. She did not brush them away now; she seemed glad to have them there at last.

Sinking down on his knees, he caught her hands. "Why did you _let_ me do such a horrible thing?" he cried. "Couldn't you have trusted me to understand? Couldn't you _see_ I loved him just as you did--No, no!" he broke down humbly. "Of course I couldn't love him as his own people did. But you must have seen how I felt about him--how I admired him, and would have followed him anywhere--and _of course_ if I had known, I should have gone away at once."

"Ah, but that was just what we were afraid of," she said quickly. "We were afraid you would go away and have a lonely leave somewhere. And in these days a boy's leave is so precious a thing that nothing must spoil it--_nothing_," she reiterated; and her tears fell upon his hands like a benediction. "But we didn't do it very well, I'm afraid," she went on presently, with gentle contrition. "You were too quick and understanding; you guessed there was something wrong. We were sorry

not
to manage better," she apologized.

"Oh, you wonderful, wonderful people!" he gasped. "Doing everything for my happiness, when all the time--all the time--"

His voice went out sharply, as his mind flashed back to scene after scene: to Gerald's long body lying quivering on the grass; to Sybil Gaylord wishing Sally Berkeley happiness out of her own tragedy; and to the high look on Lady Sherwood's face. They seemed to him themselves, and yet more than themselves--shining bits in the mosaic of a great nation. Disjointedly there passed through his mind familiar words--"these are they who have washed their garments--having come out of great tribulation." No wonder they seemed older.

"We--we couldn't have done it in America," he said humbly.

He had a desperate desire to get away to himself; to hide his face in his arms, and give vent to the tears that were stifling him; to weep for his lost friend, and for this great heartbreaking heroism of theirs.

"But why did you do it?" he persisted. "Was it because I was his friend?"

"Oh, it was much more than that," Gerald said quickly. "It was a matter of the two countries. Of course, we jolly well knew you didn't belong to us, and didn't want to, but for the life of us we couldn't help a sort of feeling that you did. And when America was in at last, and you fellows began to come, you seemed like our very own come back after many years, and," he added a throb in his voice, "we were most awfully glad to see you--we wanted a chance to show you how England felt."

Skipworth Cary rose to his feet. The tears for his friend were still wet upon his lashes. Stooping, he took Lady Sherwood's hands in his and raised them to his lips. "As long as I live, I shall never forget," he said. "And others of us have seen it too in other ways--be sure America will never forget, either."

She looked up at his untouched youth out of her beautiful sad eyes, the exalted light still shining through her tears. "Yes," she said, "you see it was--I don't know exactly how to put it--but it was England to America."

MRS. MANSTEY'S VIEW, by Edith Wharton

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The view from Mrs. Manstey's window was not a striking one, but to her at least it was full of interest and beauty. Mrs. Manstey occupied the back room on the third floor of a New York boarding-house, in a street where the ash-barrels lingered late on the sidewalk and the gaps in the pavement would have staggered a Quintus Curtius. She was the widow of a clerk in a large wholesale house, and his death had left her alone, for her only daughter had married in California, and could not afford the long journey to New York to see her mother. Mrs. Manstey, perhaps, might have joined her daughter in the West, but they had now been so many years apart that they had ceased to feel any need of each other's society, and their intercourse had long been limited to the exchange of a few perfunctory letters, written with indifference by the daughter, and with difficulty by Mrs. Manstey, whose right hand was growing stiff with gout. Even had she felt a stronger desire for her daughter's companionship, Mrs. Manstey's increasing infirmity, which caused her to dread the three flights of stairs between her room and the street, would have given her pause on the eve of undertaking so long a journey; and without perhaps, formulating these reasons she had long since accepted as a matter of course her solitary life in New York.

She was, indeed, not quite lonely, for a few friends still toiled up now and then to her room; but their visits grew rare as the years went by. Mrs. Manstey had never been a sociable woman, and during her husband's lifetime his companionship had been all-sufficient to her. For many years she had cherished a desire to live in the country, to have a hen-house and a garden; but this longing had faded with age, leaving only in the breast of the uncommunicative old woman a vague tenderness for plants and animals. It was, perhaps, this tenderness which made her cling so fervently to her view from her window, a view in which the most optimistic eye would

at first have failed to discover anything admirable.

Mrs. Manstey, from her coign of vantage (a slightly projecting bow-window where she nursed an ivy and a succession of unwholesome-looking bulbs), looked out first upon the yard of her own dwelling, of which, however, she could get but a restricted glimpse. Still, her gaze took in the topmost boughs of the ailanthus below her window, and she knew how early each year the clump of dicentra strung its bending stalk with hearts of pink.

But of greater interest were the yards beyond. Being for the most part attached to boarding-houses they were in a state of chronic untidiness and fluttering, on certain days of the week, with miscellaneous garments and frayed table-cloths. In spite of this Mrs. Manstey found much to admire in the long vista which she commanded. Some of the yards were, indeed, but stony wastes, with grass in the cracks of the pavement and no shade in spring save that afforded by the intermittent leafage of the clothes-lines. These yards Mrs. Manstey disapproved of, but the others, the green ones, she loved. She had grown used to their disorder; the broken barrels, the empty bottles and paths unswept no longer annoyed her; hers was the happy faculty of dwelling on the pleasanter side of the prospect before her.

In the very next enclosure did not a magnolia open its hard white flowers against the watery blue of April? And was there not, a little way down the line, a fence foamed over every May be lilac waves of wistaria? Farther still, a horse-chestnut lifted its candelabra of buff and pink blossoms above broad fans of foliage; while in the opposite yard June was sweet with the breath of a neglected syringa, which persisted in growing in spite of the countless obstacles opposed to its welfare.

But if nature occupied the front rank in Mrs. Manstey's view, there was much of a more personal character to interest her in the aspect of the houses and their inmates. She deeply disapproved of the mustard-colored curtains which had lately been hung in the doctor's window opposite; but

she glowed with pleasure when the house farther down had its old bricks washed with a coat of paint. The occupants of the houses did not often show themselves at the back windows, but the servants were always in sight. Noisy slatterns, Mrs. Manstey pronounced the greater number; she knew their ways and hated them. But to the quiet cook in the newly painted house, whose mistress bullied her, and who secretly fed the stray cats at nightfall, Mrs. Manstey's warmest sympathies were given. On one occasion her feelings were racked by the neglect of a housemaid, who for two days forgot to feed the parrot committed to her care. On the third day, Mrs. Manstey, in spite of her gouty hand, had just penned a letter, beginning: "Madam, it is now three days since your parrot has been fed," when the forgetful maid appeared at the window with a cup of seed in her hand.

But in Mrs. Manstey's more meditative moods it was the narrowing perspective of far-off yards which pleased her best. She loved, at twilight, when the distant brown-stone spire seemed melting in the fluid yellow of the west, to lose herself in vague memories of a trip to Europe, made years ago, and now reduced in her mind's eye to a pale phantasmagoria of indistinct steeples and dreamy skies. Perhaps at heart Mrs. Manstey was an artist; at all events she was sensible of many changes of color unnoticed by the average eye, and dear to her as the green of early spring was the black lattice of branches against a cold sulphur sky at the close of a snowy day. She enjoyed, also, the sunny thaws of March, when patches of earth showed through the snow, like ink-spots spreading on a sheet of white blotting-paper; and, better still, the haze of boughs, leafless but swollen, which replaced the clear-cut tracery of winter. She even watched with a certain interest the trail of smoke from a far-off factory chimney, and missed a detail in the landscape when the factory was closed and the smoke disappeared.

Mrs. Manstey, in the long hours which she spent at her window, was not idle. She read a little, and knitted numberless stockings; but the view

surrounded and shaped her life as the sea does a lonely island. When her rare callers came it was difficult for her to detach herself from the contemplation of the opposite window-washing, or the scrutiny of certain green points in a neighboring flower-bed which might, or might not, turn into hyacinths, while she feigned an interest in her visitor's anecdotes about some unknown grandchild. Mrs. Manstey's real friends were the denizens of the yards, the hyacinths, the magnolia, the green parrot, the maid who fed the cats, the doctor who studied late behind his mustard-colored curtains; and the confidant of her tenderer musings was the church-spire floating in the sunset.

One April day, as she sat in her usual place, with knitting cast aside and eyes fixed on the blue sky mottled with round clouds, a knock at the door announced the entrance of her landlady. Mrs. Manstey did not care for her landlady, but she submitted to her visits with ladylike resignation. To-day, however, it seemed harder than usual to turn from the blue sky and the blossoming magnolia to Mrs. Sampson's unsuggestive face, and Mrs. Manstey was conscious of a distinct effort as she did so.

"The magnolia is out earlier than usual this year, Mrs. Sampson," she remarked, yielding to a rare impulse, for she seldom alluded to the absorbing interest of her life. In the first place it was a topic not likely to appeal to her visitors and, besides, she lacked the power of expression and could not have given utterance to her feelings had she wished to.

"The what, Mrs. Manstey?" inquired the landlady, glancing about the room as if to find there the explanation of Mrs. Manstey's statement.

"The magnolia in the next yard—in Mrs. Black's yard," Mrs. Manstey repeated.

"Is it, indeed? I didn't know there was a magnolia there," said Mrs. Sampson, carelessly. Mrs. Manstey looked at her; she did not know that

there was a magnolia in the next yard!

"By the way," Mrs. Sampson continued, "speaking of Mrs. Black reminds me that the work on the extension is to begin next week."

"The what?" it was Mrs. Manstey's turn to ask.

"The extension," said Mrs. Sampson, nodding her head in the direction of the ignored magnolia. "You knew, of course, that Mrs. Black was going to build an extension to her house? Yes, ma'am. I hear it is to run right back to the end of the yard. How she can afford to build an extension in these hard times I don't see; but she always was crazy about building. She used to keep a boarding-house in Seventeenth Street, and she nearly ruined herself then by sticking out bow-windows and what not; I should have thought that would have cured her of building, but I guess it's a disease, like drink. Anyhow, the work is to begin on Monday."

Mrs. Manstey had grown pale. She always spoke slowly, so the landlady did not heed the long pause which followed. At last Mrs. Manstey said: "Do you know how high the extension will be?"

"That's the most absurd part of it. The extension is to be built right up to the roof of the main building; now, did you ever?"

Mrs. Manstey paused again. "Won't it be a great annoyance to you, Mrs. Sampson?" she asked.

"I should say it would. But there's no help for it; if people have got a mind to build extensions there's no law to prevent 'em, that I'm aware of." Mrs. Manstey, knowing this, was silent. "There is no help for it," Mrs. Sampson repeated, "but if I AM a church member, I wouldn't be so sorry if it ruined Eliza Black. Well, good-day, Mrs. Manstey; I'm glad to find you so comfortable."

So comfortable—so comfortable! Left to herself the old woman turned once more to the window. How lovely the view was that day! The blue sky with its round clouds shed a brightness over everything; the ailanthus had put on a tinge of yellow-green, the hyacinths were budding, the magnolia flowers looked more than ever like rosettes carved in alabaster. Soon the wistaria would bloom, then the horse-chestnut; but not for her. Between her eyes and them a barrier of brick and mortar would swiftly rise; presently even the spire would disappear, and all her radiant world be blotted out. Mrs. Manstey sent away untouched the dinner-tray brought to her that evening. She lingered in the window until the windy sunset died in bat-colored dusk; then, going to bed, she lay sleepless all night.

Early the next day she was up and at the window. It was raining, but even through the slanting gray gauze the scene had its charm—and then the rain was so good for the trees. She had noticed the day before that the ailanthus was growing dusty.

"Of course I might move," said Mrs. Manstey aloud, and turning from the window she looked about her room. She might move, of course; so might she be flayed alive; but she was not likely to survive either operation. The room, though far less important to her happiness than the view, was as much a part of her existence. She had lived in it seventeen years. She knew every stain on the wall-paper, every rent in the carpet; the light fell in a certain way on her engravings, her books had grown shabby on their shelves, her bulbs and ivy were used to their window and knew which way to lean to the sun. "We are all too old to move," she said.

That afternoon it cleared. Wet and radiant the blue reappeared through torn rags of cloud; the ailanthus sparkled; the earth in the flower-borders looked rich and warm. It was Thursday, and on Monday the building of the extension was to begin.

On Sunday afternoon a card was brought to Mrs. Black, as she was engaged in gathering up the fragments of the boarders' dinner in the basement. The card, black-edged, bore Mrs. Manstey's name.

"One of Mrs. Sampson's boarders; wants to move, I suppose. Well, I can give her a room next year in the extension. Dinah," said Mrs. Black, "tell the lady I'll be upstairs in a minute."

Mrs. Black found Mrs. Manstey standing in the long parlor garnished with statuettes and antimacassars; in that house she could not sit down.

Stooping hurriedly to open the register, which let out a cloud of dust, Mrs. Black advanced on her visitor.

"I'm happy to meet you, Mrs. Manstey; take a seat, please," the landlady remarked in her prosperous voice, the voice of a woman who can afford to build extensions. There was no help for it; Mrs. Manstey sat down.

"Is there anything I can do for you, ma'am?" Mrs. Black continued. "My house is full at present, but I am going to build an extension, and—"

"It is about the extension that I wish to speak," said Mrs. Manstey, suddenly. "I am a poor woman, Mrs. Black, and I have never been a happy one. I shall have to talk about myself first to—to make you understand."

Mrs. Black, astonished but imperturbable, bowed at this parenthesis.

"I never had what I wanted," Mrs. Manstey continued. "It was always one disappointment after another. For years I wanted to live in the country. I dreamed and dreamed about it; but we never could manage it. There was no sunny window in our house, and so all my plants died. My daughter married years ago and went away—besides, she never cared for the same things. Then my husband died and I was left alone. That was seventeen

years ago. I went to live at Mrs. Sampson's, and I have been there ever since. I have grown a little infirm, as you see, and I don't get out often; only on fine days, if I am feeling very well. So you can understand my sitting a great deal in my window—the back window on the third floor—"

"Well, Mrs. Manstey," said Mrs. Black, liberally, "I could give you a back room, I dare say; one of the new rooms in the ex—"

"But I don't want to move; I can't move," said Mrs. Manstey, almost with a scream. "And I came to tell you that if you build that extension I shall have no view from my window—no view! Do you understand?"

Mrs. Black thought herself face to face with a lunatic, and she had always heard that lunatics must be humored.

"Dear me, dear me," she remarked, pushing her chair back a little way, "that is too bad, isn't it? Why, I never thought of that. To be sure, the extension WILL interfere with your view, Mrs. Manstey."

"You do understand?" Mrs. Manstey gasped.

"Of course I do. And I'm real sorry about it, too. But there, don't you worry, Mrs. Manstey. I guess we can fix that all right."

Mrs. Manstey rose from her seat, and Mrs. Black slipped toward the door.

"What do you mean by fixing it? Do you mean that I can induce you to change your mind about the extension? Oh, Mrs. Black, listen to me. I have two thousand dollars in the bank and I could manage, I know I could manage, to give you a thousand if—" Mrs. Manstey paused; the tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"There, there, Mrs. Manstey, don't you worry," repeated Mrs. Black,

soothingly. "I am sure we can settle it. I am sorry that I can't stay and talk about it any longer, but this is such a busy time of day, with supper to get —"

Her hand was on the door-knob, but with sudden vigor Mrs. Manstey seized her wrist.

"You are not giving me a definite answer. Do you mean to say that you accept my proposition?"

"Why, I'll think it over, Mrs. Manstey, certainly I will. I wouldn't annoy you for the world—"

"But the work is to begin to-morrow, I am told," Mrs. Manstey persisted.

Mrs. Black hesitated. "It shan't begin, I promise you that; I'll send word to the builder this very night." Mrs. Manstey tightened her hold.

"You are not deceiving me, are you?" she said.

"No—no," stammered Mrs. Black. "How can you think such a thing of me, Mrs. Manstey?"

Slowly Mrs. Manstey's clutch relaxed, and she passed through the open door. "One thousand dollars," she repeated, pausing in the hall; then she let herself out of the house and hobbled down the steps, supporting herself on the cast-iron railing.

"My goodness," exclaimed Mrs. Black, shutting and bolting the hall-door, "I never knew the old woman was crazy! And she looks so quiet and ladylike, too."

Mrs. Manstey slept well that night, but early the next morning she was

awakened by a sound of hammering. She got to her window with what haste she might and, looking out saw that Mrs. Black's yard was full of workmen. Some were carrying loads of brick from the kitchen to the yard, others beginning to demolish the old-fashioned wooden balcony which adorned each story of Mrs. Black's house. Mrs. Manstey saw that she had been deceived. At first she thought of confiding her trouble to Mrs. Sampson, but a settled discouragement soon took possession of her and she went back to bed, not caring to see what was going on.

Toward afternoon, however, feeling that she must know the worst, she rose and dressed herself. It was a laborious task, for her hands were stiffer than usual, and the hooks and buttons seemed to evade her.

When she seated herself in the window, she saw that the workmen had removed the upper part of the balcony, and that the bricks had multiplied since morning. One of the men, a coarse fellow with a bloated face, picked a magnolia blossom and, after smelling it, threw it to the ground; the next man, carrying a load of bricks, trod on the flower in passing.

"Look out, Jim," called one of the men to another who was smoking a pipe, "if you throw matches around near those barrels of paper you'll have the old tinder-box burning down before you know it." And Mrs. Manstey, leaning forward, perceived that there were several barrels of paper and rubbish under the wooden balcony.

At length the work ceased and twilight fell. The sunset was perfect and a roseate light, transfiguring the distant spire, lingered late in the west. When it grew dark Mrs. Manstey drew down the shades and proceeded, in her usual methodical manner, to light her lamp. She always filled and lit it with her own hands, keeping a kettle of kerosene on a zinc-covered shelf in a closet. As the lamp-light filled the room it assumed its usual peaceful aspect. The books and pictures and plants seemed, like their mistress, to settle themselves down for another quiet evening, and Mrs. Manstey, as

was her wont, drew up her armchair to the table and began to knit.

That night she could not sleep. The weather had changed and a wild wind was abroad, blotting the stars with close-driven clouds. Mrs. Manstey rose once or twice and looked out of the window; but of the view nothing was discernible save a tardy light or two in the opposite windows. These lights at last went out, and Mrs. Manstey, who had watched for their extinction, began to dress herself. She was in evident haste, for she merely flung a thin dressing-gown over her night-dress and wrapped her head in a scarf; then she opened her closet and cautiously took out the kettle of kerosene. Having slipped a bundle of wooden matches into her pocket she proceeded, with increasing precautions, to unlock her door, and a few moments later she was feeling her way down the dark staircase, led by a glimmer of gas from the lower hall. At length she reached the bottom of the stairs and began the more difficult descent into the utter darkness of the basement. Here, however, she could move more freely, as there was less danger of being overheard; and without much delay she contrived to unlock the iron door leading into the yard. A gust of cold wind smote her as she stepped out and groped shiveringly under the clothes-lines.

That morning at three o'clock an alarm of fire brought the engines to Mrs. Black's door, and also brought Mrs. Sampson's startled boarders to their windows. The wooden balcony at the back of Mrs. Black's house was ablaze, and among those who watched the progress of the flames was Mrs. Manstey, leaning in her thin dressing-gown from the open window.

The fire, however, was soon put out, and the frightened occupants of the house, who had fled in scant attire, reassembled at dawn to find that little mischief had been done beyond the cracking of window panes and smoking of ceilings. In fact, the chief sufferer by the fire was Mrs. Manstey, who was found in the morning gasping with pneumonia, a not unnatural result, as everyone remarked, of her having hung out of an open window at her age in a dressing-gown. It was easy to see that she was very ill, but no

one had guessed how grave the doctor's verdict would be, and the faces gathered that evening about Mrs. Sampson's table were awestruck and disturbed. Not that any of the boarders knew Mrs. Manstey well; she "kept to herself," as they said, and seemed to fancy herself too good for them; but then it is always disagreeable to have anyone dying in the house and, as one lady observed to another: "It might just as well have been you or me, my dear."

But it was only Mrs. Manstey; and she was dying, as she had lived, lonely if not alone. The doctor had sent a trained nurse, and Mrs. Sampson, with muffled step, came in from time to time; but both, to Mrs. Manstey, seemed remote and unsubstantial as the figures in a dream. All day she said nothing; but when she was asked for her daughter's address she shook her head. At times the nurse noticed that she seemed to be listening attentively for some sound which did not come; then again she dozed.

The next morning at daylight she was very low. The nurse called Mrs. Sampson and as the two bent over the old woman they saw her lips move.

"Lift me up—out of bed," she whispered.

They raised her in their arms, and with her stiff hand she pointed to the window.

"Oh, the window—she wants to sit in the window. She used to sit there all day," Mrs. Sampson explained. "It can do her no harm, I suppose?"

"Nothing matters now," said the nurse.

They carried Mrs. Manstey to the window and placed her in her chair. The dawn was abroad, a jubilant spring dawn; the spire had already caught a golden ray, though the magnolia and horse-chestnut still slumbered in shadow. In Mrs. Black's yard all was quiet. The charred timbers of the

balcony lay where they had fallen. It was evident that since the fire the builders had not returned to their work. The magnolia had unfolded a few more sculptural flowers; the view was undisturbed.

It was hard for Mrs. Manstey to breathe; each moment it grew more difficult. She tried to make them open the window, but they would not understand. If she could have tasted the air, sweet with the penetrating ailanthus savor, it would have eased her; but the view at least was there—the spire was golden now, the heavens had warmed from pearl to blue, day was alight from east to west, even the magnolia had caught the sun.

Mrs. Manstey's head fell back and smiling she died.

That day the building of the extension was resumed.

The End